

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF WEST POINT CLASS
STANDING AND ACHIEVEMENT OF THE RANK OF GENERAL OFFICER

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Personnel Research Section
Personnel Research and Procedures Branch, AGO

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A STUDY OF WEST POINT STANDINGS OF GENERAL OFFICERS

BRIEF

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

A series of studies is being conducted to determine the relationships between cadets' performances at West Point and their subsequent performances as officers. As part of the series, this study was designed to explore the question: How high did present Army general officers stand in their West Point classes?

RESULTS:

1. The records of the general officers showed that they had held a median percentile rank in their West Point classes of 68.5 (50.0 would be the middle of a class).
2. Present general officers who had graduated from West Point in 1918 or later had a median class rank of 85.5 while present general officers who graduated before that had a median class rank of 65.5.
3. Graduates who became general officers in 1942 or after had a median class rank of 73.3 while those who were general officers by 1941 had a median class rank of 64.7.

CONCLUSIONS:

The results seem to indicate that present general officers were well above the middle of their West Point classes. However, any conclusions which might be based on these findings should be regarded as highly tentative in view of the small number of general officers available for this study.

WORK SUMMARY:

West Point class standings were obtained for 88 officers who were generals in 1946. These general officers were divided into four groups, as follows: (1) graduated before 1918 and became general officers before 1942; (2) graduated before 1918 and became general officers in 1942 or after, (3) graduated in 1918 or after and became general officers before 1942; (4) graduated in 1918 or after and became general officers in 1942 or after. Each officer's percentile rank based on his standing in his own class was computed. On the basis of median class standing, the four groups were compared.

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PROBLEM

This is one of a series of studies currently being conducted by the Personnel Research Section in cooperation with the West Point Military Academy.^{1/} A major aspect of this program is the determination of the relationship between performance in the Academy and later officer performance. Such data have possible use as a basis for improving the selection system for West Point, as well as the grading procedures, curriculum content, and weighting of curriculum elements at the school. Two such studies have already been completed. In the first,^{2/} the relationship between components of final class standing at the Academy and efficiency as Army officers 18 months after graduation was investigated for the class of 1944. The second study^{3/} involved a similar analysis for the classes of 1944, 1945, and 1946, allowing a longer period -- 1½ to 4½ years -- to elapse after graduation. Results from these studies showed that over-all final class standing at the Academy bore no relationship to officer success 18 months to 4½ years after graduation, as indicated by near zero correlations with measures from Officer Efficiency Report Forms. However, one of the components of final class standing, Aptitude for Service, appeared to be a relatively good predictor of later success.

It is unlikely that, in such short periods following graduation, the officers would have had opportunity to demonstrate their maximum potential. Follow-up studies allowing longer periods of time to elapse after leaving the Academy are desirable in order to obtain more accurate assessment of the relationship between West Point performance and later officer performance.

Since attainment of the rank of general officer may be considered one of the highest achievements in the Army, a study of the West Point performance of men who have attained this position should provide material of value in assessing the West Point grading system. This consideration led to the exploratory study here reported to determine whether a relationship exists between West Point class standing and achievement of the rank of general. If the need arises, a more thorough investigation of the problem may be initiated in the future.

PROCEDURES

Eighty-eight West Point graduates who were general officers in the Army of the United States in 1946 comprised the population for the study. Officers who were in the Air Corps immediately prior to achieving this rank were omitted from consideration. Included in the group are 5 generals, 16 lieutenant generals, and 67 major generals. Limitation of time and personnel prevented the inclusion of the total population of general officers who were West Point graduates. Inasmuch as this is an exploratory study, the sample selected may be considered adequate for the purpose.

1/ This program has been authorized per DF, File No. SPPP-L 351.11 Mil. Ac. (21 Mar 46), Subject: Studies in Personnel Policies and Procedures at West Point.

2/ See PRS Report 767, Follow-up Study of Officer Performance of West Point Graduates, 1948.

3/ See PRS Report 811, Follow-up Validation of Predictor Instruments for West Point Classes of 1944, 1945, and 1946 Against 1948 Ratings on Form 67-1, 1949.

The names and year of graduation from the Academy of all the Regular Army officers with the rank of major general and above were secured from the 1946 Army register, omitting those in the Air Corps. Final class standings were secured from the yearly official registers of officers and cadets of the United States Military Academy. It should be noted that the components of final class standing and their weights have varied to some extent through the years. In essence, however, this variable always has been and continues to be mainly a measure of academic success in an engineering school.

Percentile ranks based on class standing were computed for the officers. The total group was then divided into four sub-groups, as follows:

1. General officers who graduated from West Point in 1917 or before, and who achieved the rank of brigadier general in 1941 or before, either in permanent establishment or otherwise.
2. General officers who graduated from West Point in 1917 or before, and who achieved the rank of brigadier general in 1942 or after.
3. General officers who graduated from West Point in 1918 or after, and who achieved the rank of brigadier general in 1941 or before.
4. General officers who graduated from West Point in 1918 or after, and who achieved the rank of brigadier general in 1942 or after.

The group was divided in this manner in order to determine if World War I experience and the exigencies of World War II affected the relationship of West Point class standing to the achievement of the rank of general. The median percentile rank for each group and for the total group was then determined.

RESULTS

The median percentile rank of 68.5 for the total group presents evidence that the officers attaining the rank of general had on the average, higher class standing at West Point than did the typical graduate. Table 1 presents the median percentile rank for each sub-group and for the total group. It should be emphasized here that if the general officers were typical West Point graduates, their percentile ranks would be .50.

It is also apparent from Table 1 that the officers graduating from the Academy in 1918 or after, and thus having had no World War I experience, had higher West Point class standings than did those who graduated in 1917 or before and thus served in World War I. The median percentile rank for the younger officers was 85.5 as compared with 65.5 for the earlier graduates. There is also an indication that the officers who attained the rank of brigadier general in 1942 or after (i.e., during World War II) had performed somewhat better at West Point than those attaining this position before the advent of the war (median percentile rank of 73.3 compared with 64.7).

TABLE 1

MEDIAN PERCENTILE RANKS IN WEST POINT CLASS STANDING OF
88 GENERAL OFFICERS IN THE REGULAR ARMY, 1946

Year of becoming Brigadier General Year of Graduation from West Point	1941 or before	1942 or after	Total Group
1917 or before	64.7 (36)*	68.0 (35)	65.5 (71)
1918 or after		85.5 (17)	85.5 (17)
Total Group	64.7 (36)	73.3 (52)	68.5 (88)

*N's are indicated in parentheses.

The relatively small number involved in the study would lead one to question the stability of the results. This fact, combined with the difficulty of assessing the differential effects of such factors as war experience, the influence of war needs, and so forth, preclude the drawing of definite conclusions. It is probable, however, that this study has implications for further research on prediction of success as an Army officer.

PERSONNEL

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