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HAZING AT WEST POINT.

By

Major-General O. O. Howard,
U. S. Army, (Retired)

Hazing at West Point in 1850 had a great many phases. The older cadets seemed to take a good deal of satisfaction some times in making orderlies of the plebes. A form of expression in camp was: "Go, plebe, put down those beds." To obey this order the plebe would stretch out the mattress, when there were mattresses, and unfold the blankets and spread them out, never having sheets or pillow cases. Often blankets only were used without mattresses. During the day the blankets had been folded with great care and even edges in the corner of the platform which was the floor of the tent. The tired plebe in a given tent would hardly be asleep before two young men would seize the foot of his mattress or blanket and ~~move~~^{perk} it forward into the street, and then quickly be apparently in profound slumber in their own tent.

Two cadets from my state who had been one year at the Military Academy always treated me with apparent respect, but they instructed me that it was customary for ⁺Septas after going into barracks, to bring water from the tank for the benefit of third classmen who ordered it. I knew better for I had experienced similar or worse hazing in College, yet laughingly complied with the young men's verbal orders.

Another form of hazing very frequent was for an older cadet to wait in the dark close by a sentinel's beat, sometimes called a sentinel's post, and as soon as his back was turned to dart across the line and then mockingly reprimand him for inefficiency. One of our young plebes who had for some time understood West Point ways, with his bayonet wounded three or four of those who were making ^{such} sport at his expense. He sent them to the hospital and that revealed their

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Haking at West Point in 1880 had a great many phases. The
older cadets seemed to take a good deal of satisfaction some times
in making orderlies of the pipes. A form of expression in camp
was: "Go, pipe, put down those beds." To obey this order the pipe
would stretch out the mattress, when there were mattresses, and unfold
the blankets and spread them out, never having sheets or pillow
cases. Often blankets only were used without mattresses. During
the day the blankets had been folded with great care and even edges
in the corner of the platform which was the floor of the tent. The
first place in a given tent would hardly be asleep before two young
men would seize the foot of his mattress or blanket and move it for-
ward under the street, and then quickly be apparently in profound
slumber in their own tent.

The cadets from my state who had been one year at the Military
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Another form of haking very frequent was for an older cadet
to wait in the dark close by a sentinel's post, sometimes called a
sentinel's post, and as soon as his back was turned to start across
the line and then mockingly reproach him for inefficiency. One
of our young pipes who had for some time understood West Point ways,
with his bayonet wounded three or four of those who were haking about
at his expense. He sent them to the hospital and that revealed their

mischievous.

Before we broke up camp a favorite sport was for older cadets who had been designated, sometimes by authority and sometimes on their own volition, to gather groups of new cadets into section rooms, to give out impossible problems for the plebes to solve, and to give them marks of demerit ad libitum ~~and~~ ^{and} scores of apparent delinquencies. This was all done before the commencement of bona fide recitations under proper instructors, before any marks of ^{real} demerit were given a young man, and before they were registered and counted.

I think what annoyed new cadets more than anything was the constraint put upon them for the first two or three months to effect what is called "the setting up of the recruit," the stepping out so as to strike the ball of the foot first, the keeping of the little finger on the seam of the trousers, the drawing in the chin and the throwing out the chest. This was official and effected through older cadets detailed for that purpose, generally set in operation at the drilling of squads early and late. These drills were always accompanied with the advice for plebes or new cadets to keep up that form of constraint, laughable enough, both when on and when off duty, at all times, ^{outside in} or quarters.

What hurt most in the summer time was when the young ladies with their attendant cadet companions were looking on and clapping their hands in view of "the setting up," and the fun that would pass through a group with gentle laughter when the tortured youngsters ~~were~~ ^{singly or by twos} moved out, across the plain or along the road in any direction.

The next year after my entry, 1850, one of my classmates, George A. Gordon, the son of Commodore Gordon of the Navy, with a small group of our class undertook to haze some sentinels posted

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Before we broke up camp a favorite sport was for older cadets who had been designated, sometimes by authority and sometimes on their own volition, to gather groups of new cadets into section rooms, to give out impossible problems for the pipes to solve, and to give them marks of demerit as ^{and} ~~little~~ ^{and} scores of apparent delinquencies. This was all done before the commencement of bona fide relations under proper instructions, before any marks of demerit were given a young man, and before they were registered and counted.

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That first night in the summer time was when the young ladies with their attendant cadet companions were looking on and clapping their hands in view of the setting up, and the fun that would pass through a group with gentle laughter when the tortured youngsters ^{simply by force} moved out, across the plain or along the road in any direction.

The next year after my entry, 1855, one of my classmates, George A. Gordon, the son of Commodore Gordon of the Navy, with a small group of our class undertook to raise some sentimenta posters

around the cadet encampment. Their operation was to approach the sentinel in the dark under the guise of a sergeant or corporal of the guard and ask him several questions, at first proper enough, and then ask him to hand over his musket for their inspection. Some of the sentinels were green enough to do it, but they very soon encountered one who thoroughly remembered his instructions. When they undertook to take from him his musket he used the bayonet and wounded Gordon quite severely in the thigh. Gordon was laid up in the hospital for some time; and as he was a great favorite with his classmates we were very much afraid at first that he would not live, and then when that danger was past we feared his dismissal from the Academy, but the punishment was tempered with mercy and Gordon was allowed to stay and graduate.

George H. Thomas entered West Point in June, 1836. During his first year some of the cadets put their heads together in a sort of boyish conspiracy to bring down Thomas's pride and showing of independence. He was made to undergo a great variety of the hazing processes then in vogue. His being seventeen years old and a large, dignified, young Virginian did not save him from ^{the} annoyance and persecution of this fun-loving group; but he was sturdy, ^{and self-poised,} laughed at their efforts to annoy him, and never murmured or complained. As a rule, new cadets who act as Thomas did are soon respected for their heroic characteristics and let alone. In an address on Gen. Thomas I said I thought that the elevation of soul that Thomas must have acquired through sundry duckings, grid-iron performances and sore shins was extraordinary; but when the next year came around and some of his intimates asked Thomas to join in hazing the plebes he refused with his wonted firmness, and always gave those subject to

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George M. Thomas entered West Point in June, 1856. During
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Thomas I said I thought that the elevation of soul that Thomas must
have acquired through many humiliations, trials from persecution and
sore shame was extraordinary; but when the next year came around and
some of his intimates asked Thomas to join in hazing the plebes he
refused with his wonted firmness, and always gave those subject to

such pranks the best of advice, and in this way Thomas secured to himself lifelong friends. You could not place General George H. Thomas where he would not be a friend of the outraged and oppressed.

I had been long in error with reference to Gen. Phil Sheridan, thinking that he had been suspended from West Point on account of *his* hazing. That was not the case. Sheridan entered the Academy in 1848. After his return from furlough he had a difficulty with a cadet sergeant, Wm. R. Terrill. Terrill was a file closer and Sheridan was a cadet private in the ranks. Terrill gave him an order which Sheridan regarded as an improper one, and he gave it in such a tone of disrespect that the result was that the fiery young man stepped out of ranks and threatened the sergeant with his fixed bayonet. Sheridan did not at the time go to extremes, but afterward meeting Terrill, notwithstanding his size, Terrill being much larger and stronger, he attacked him with both fists, but before blood was shed a commissioned officer intervened and separated the belligerents. Terrill reported Sheridan and he was suspended for one year and graduated in 1853 in the class of which James B. McPherson was the head. After some years Sheridan said: "Though the mortification I then endured was deep and trying I am convinced it was hardly as much as I deserved for such an outrageous breach of discipline."

Now with regard to the case in hand in which eight cadets were tried by court-martial for hazing, and dismissed, The Superintendent, it appears, approved the findings of the court, and the President, according to the law and regulations, reviewed the case and approved their dismissal. I know that my first feeling on reading this account was an intense sympathy for the young men. I said, what a pity that such promising young men should have their

enough to make the best of advice, and in this way Thomas seemed to
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reading this account was an intense sympathy for the young men. I
said, what a pity that such promising young men should have their

career so suddenly and so peremptorily out short. I believed they were guilty of the offense and should have been punished, so that I was exceedingly glad to notice that the Secretary of War had visited the President in their behalf and that the President had reconsidered his action and sent the cadets back to the Academy to be dealt with by the authorities there. It is like any other case in court where the guilt is plain and the punishment meted out with apparent justice which, nevertheless, on a careful review is recalled or modified, tempering justice with mercy. The action of the President is just what I would have expected and just as I would have done if I had been President, when the Honorable Secretary of War intervened and showed reasons why the punishment should not be so severe as the court and the law warranted and provided. "But," said a friend, "how about the Superintendent?" Will it not be hard for him after making an honest recommendation, and after having had his opinion confirmed to be thus overruled?" Ordinarily an officer like the Superintendent of the Military Academy expects to have his proceedings examined and approved, modified or disapproved. It is the function of the reviewing officer to do this. I have been Superintendent of the Military Academy and know how hard it is for a Superintendent to act in such cases. He is expected by his superiors in authority to root out every phase of hazing, a practice that often leads to quarrels, to feuds, to fights and sometimes to death. I am surprised that the public sentiment among cadets themselves, who are now so high toned in all their ideas, should not condemn so gross an evil as hazing, and I am of the opinion that all this action by the court, by the Superintendent, by the Honorable Secretary of War, and by the President, will so react upon the corps of cadets and all connected with West Point as to ~~give a better tone to the Academy.~~ Noblesse oblige.

keep up their already high tone

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the Superintendent, by the Honorable Secretary of War, and by the
President, will be read upon the corps of cadets and all connected
with West Point as to what is right and wrong to the hilt.

Very truly yours,
John D. Long