

# A Military College Initiates A Library Instructional Program

By SIDNEY E. MATTHEWS

THE VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE in 1959 radically changed its concept as to the role of the library in a twofold educational program—academic and military. This combination, in the words of its originators, is designed to provide “practical utility, through discipline and formative training,” and to produce men of “energy, efficiency and reliability.”

The Virginia Military Institute is organized under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia and is governed by a board of visitors appointed by the governor and subject to confirmation by the state senate. In accordance with provisions of the Code of Virginia, the cadets constitute a military corps and officers at the Institute are commissioned by the governor in the Virginia Militia, unorganized. Although V.M.I. requires rigorous military training for its entire student body, the Institute always has placed its first emphasis on its academic program. Colonel J. T. L. Preston, a prime mover in the founding of V.M.I., proposed that “the object is to prepare young men for the varied work of civil life . . . the military feature, though essential to its discipline, is not primary in the Institute’s scheme of education.” The Institute has followed this concept since 1839 when it was founded as the first state military college in the nation. V.M.I. offers nine degree-granting curricula—one each in civil engineering, electrical engineering, chemistry, physics, biology, history, and English, and two in mathematics.

When it was decided to alter the library’s role, three major changes were made: (1) the library was made an aca-

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*Lt. Col. Matthews is Director of Preston Library and Associate Professor of Library Science at Virginia Military Institute.*

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demically department with the librarian reporting directly to the dean of the faculty, (2) the librarian was given academic rank and made a member of the Institute’s Academic Board, and (3) formal and informal courses in library science were officially entered in the curriculum. The formal library science courses as described in the catalog issue of the Institute’s bulletin embrace two areas: (1) “Library Science 101—Literature of the Natural Sciences. Reference materials, bibliographical methods, and use of the library in study of the natural sciences. This course is given in the fall semester and required of all biology majors.” (2) “Library Science 301—Reference Materials and Bibliographical Methods. Basic bibliographical methods and reference materials used in the various fields of the liberal arts, science, and technology, with problems and practice. Problems will be adapted to needs of individual students and may be developed in conjunction with work on a senior thesis. This course is offered both semesters.”

The informal freshman program of the Institute’s library program consists of two parts: (1) a tour and (2) three one-hour lectures with problems on use of the library. The former is under the supervision of the commandant of cadets and professor of military science and takes place either during the cadre pe-

riod or during R.O.T.C. class periods the first week of classes. All academic departments cooperate fully with the R.O.T.C. instructors in conducting these tours so as to give the freshmen a thorough examination of the academic facilities of the various departments. Any more than a cursory tour at this point would be unnecessary as the cadets are confused by various tests and by the adjustment to a rigid military way of life. The informal program of lectures with problems is part of freshman English 101. These lectures are usually given the first week in November, immediately preceding the cadet's term papers, and coincide with that part of the freshman English course in how to prepare a term (research) paper. It is usually at this time that the cadet is searching for book reviews for his history course and begins to realize how necessary it is to know how to locate materials in the library.

Instruction in the formal courses is given entirely by the librarian, and the informal course is given by the librarian with the assistance from the two other professional librarians on the Preston library staff. All library instruction is given in the library's auditorium or in its classroom.

The three one-hour lectures and problems on each in the informal program are designed to: 1) acquaint the cadet with the physical arrangement of the seven-story library building (the building is on a slope and the front entrance is located on the fifth floor which is also the first stack level) and location of collections, 2) develop the cadet's ability in locating information and to make him as self-sufficient as possible in the use of the card catalog and other reference tools, and 3) to introduce the cadet to various types of sources available to him and not to overwhelm him with too many titles.

The three lectures emphasize the dictionary catalog, reference books, and indexes. The lectures are illustrated with two filmstrips series. It is planned to

produce local slides of Preston library's floor plan and reference items not included in the films. As supplementary material the cadets use their English textbook and appropriate titles from the library.

Problems are passed out at the end of each lecture and the cadets have a two-week period to complete them. The problems are designed to direct the cadet along subject lines which are of interest to him and to use his own family name or, if his is not found, to select another beginning with the first three letters. By using this procedure, some of the usual difficulties of freshman library problems, i.e. each cadet using the same part of a book, set, or the card catalog and passing answers, are avoided. These problems are graded by the librarian and the professional staff and the grades are recorded by the English department as three units of the cadet's grade in English 101 for that grading period. As a follow-up, most of the instructors in the English department include library questions of a general nature covered in these lectures as part of one of their regular English tests.

The cadet reaction to these lectures and problems has been largely favorable. The few unfavorable comments usually center on the amount of time required. Statistics were not recorded the first year, but this past year out of a total of 250 questions, seventy-four cadets missed twenty-five or less, 163 cadets missed thirty-seven or less, and 242 cadets missed fifty or less. No cadet has ever been proficient enough to obtain a perfect score on all three sets of problems. A check of the ten cadets achieving the highest grades on these problems with their grades in other subjects showed that they were proficient in their other freshmen courses. Conversely the cadets receiving an extremely low grade on the library problems were failing one or more freshman courses. No valid inference should be drawn from this, but next year a large

number of library grades will be compared with the cadets' grades in other courses.

English faculty comments have been extremely favorable and in agreement with the type of problems presented. Requests for one or two hours of library lectures with problems have also come from other instructors in the liberal arts program and in engineering. A condensed version of the lectures, with emphasis on the particular subject area involved, has been given in electrical engineering, civil engineering, economics, American government, and geopolitics classes.

The inherent difficulties of the program include: (1) scheduling nineteen sections of freshman English, usually 350 freshmen, for three different one-hour lectures in one week, (2) lack of any type of local library handbook, (3) large number of papers to grade in which there can be no "key" for the answers since each cadet has worked with subjects of interest to him, (4) having to schedule too many cadets at one period, (5) no opportunity to discuss and go over the papers with the cadets after they have been graded, (6) no opportunity for the librarians to give each

cadet individual help and attention, and (7) extremely heavy use of the library's reference room and card catalog at this period of the academic year.

In spite of these difficulties there is general approval of the program, and for V.M.I.'s program it is highly desirable to integrate this instruction with freshman English classes. The cadet is introduced to the tools and research methods at the time he is ready to begin serious library use. This introduction is more thorough than the usual library orientation program that is often used in "freshman week" and is much more helpful. Several items indicate a degree of partial success. The cadets do not ask as many elementary questions, seem more at ease in the library, and have a clearer understanding of how to go about their work; and perhaps the 30 per cent increase in circulation over the last two years received some impetus from this program.

This joint instructional program has proved of value not only to English 101 but in subsequent courses requiring the use of the library. It has done much to make the library meaningful to the cadets of V.M.I.

## Military Librarians Workshop

Military librarians met on September 26-28 at White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico for their sixth annual workshop. More than one hundred librarians from sixty installations and representatives from Canada and Belgium were in attendance. Panel and group discussions centered around the workshop theme—"Personnel Practices in Military Libraries." Subject-centered programs covered technical and research libraries, academic libraries, and special services. Next year's meeting, of which Dwight Lyman, U. S. Underwater Sound Laboratory, Ft. Trumbull, Conn., is program chairman, will be at the U. S. Naval Ordnance Laboratory, Silver Spring, Md. The workshop is held alternately by the U. S. Army, Navy, and Air Force, with Canada acting as host in odd years.