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From the Archives

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Elihu Root on the Army War College

Not to promote war, but to preserve peace by intelligent and adequate preparation to repel aggression, this institution is founded." With those words Secretary of War Elihu Root began his address at the laying of the cornerstone for the Army War College, 21 February 1903. He would also speak on 9 November 1908, as Secretary of State and the college founder, when the building was completed. The Army War College is no longer at that location, but Root's conception of it lives on, now looking to its second century.

War Department General Order Number 155, dated 27 November 1901, established the basis for a formal tiered system of officer education, with the war college at its apex. Root envisioned the college as "a post-graduate course" where the Army's best officers would "study and confer upon the great problems of national defense, of military science, and of responsible command." Root commented:

Membership in the War College will mean honor and opportunity. In its confidential archives will be garnered the results of the best thought of the army, and in the continuous existence of the institution . . . will be found continuity of knowledge, of thought, and of military policy always available for practical uses.

In his later address at the building's dedication, Root spoke of the importance of the Army War College to the nation:

It is not strange that on the shore of the beautiful Potomac, in a land devoted to peace, there should arise a structure devoted to increasing the efficiency of an army for wars. The world is growing more pacific; war is condemned more widely as the years go on. Humanity and the desire to promote the happiness of men are slowly but surely gaining ground. Nevertheless, selfishness, greed, jealousy, a willingness to become great through injustice, have not disappeared, and only by slow steps is man making progress. So long as greed and jealousy exist among men, so long the nation must be prepared to defend its rights.

Root closed that day with the following words to the college's faculty and students, a charge aimed in a somewhat different direction, but advice which rings as true nearly a hundred years on:

Do not cease to be citizens of the United States. The conditions of army life are such as to narrow your views. Strive to broaden your sympathies by mingling with those outside of the service and learning from them the things they can teach you. As you are good soldiers, be good citizens. Let our army be never one of aggression, but devoted to the interests of justice and peace.

Sources: "The Army War College, Address at the Laying of the Cornerstone, Washington, D.C., February 21, 1903," and "The Army War College, Address at the Dedication, November 9, 1908," in Elihu Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States, Addresses and Reports*, collected and ed. Robert Bacon and James Brown Scott (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1916), pp. 121-29. Harry P. Ball, *Of Responsible Command: A History of the U.S. Army War College* (rev. ed.; Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College Alumni Association, 1994).

Reviewed 15 February 2001. Please send comments or corrections to carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil