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From the Archives

Passing (and Failing) at West Point

A favorite expression among West Point instructors is that “much of the history we teach was made by people we taught.” Notable names such as Grant and Lee, Pershing and MacArthur, Eisenhower and Patton, Westmoreland and Schwarzkopf are among the more than 50,000 graduates of the United States Military Academy. Then there are some who left the academy without graduating and became known in fields other than the military.

Notable Graduates and Class Rankings

Robert E. Lee, 1829: Second out of 46
Ulysses S. Grant, 1843: 21st out of 39
George E. Pickett, 1846: 59th out of 59
George B. McClellan, 1846: Second out of 59
George Armstrong Custer, 1861: 35th out of 35
John J. Pershing, 1886: 30th out of 77
Douglas MacArthur, 1903: First out of 93
George S. Patton, 1909: 46th out of 103
Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1915: 61st out of 168
William C. Westmoreland, 1936: 112th out of 276
Alexander Haig, 1947: 167th out of 363
H. Norman Schwarzkopf, 1956: 43d out of 480
Wesley Clark, 1966: First out of 579
David H. Petraeus, 1974: 40th out of 833

Famous Former Cadets

Poet and author **Edgar Allan Poe** deliberately caused his expulsion in 1831 for “gross neglect of duty” and “disobedience of orders.” As an enlisted man, Poe served for two years at forts in Boston and Charleston, South Carolina, before attending West Point.

Artist **James McNeill Whistler** was judged “deficient in chemistry” and dismissed in 1854. He later said, “If silicon were a gas, I would have been a general one day.” Whistler’s father was an 1819 West Point graduate.

Narcotics researcher and experimenter **Timothy Leary** left the academy in 1941, perhaps foreshadowing his 1960s advice to “turn on, tune in, and drop out.”

Sources: Nicholas Hobbes, *Essential Militaria: Facts, Legends, and Curiosities about Warfare through the Ages* (New York: Grove Press, 2003); *The Register of Graduates and Former Cadets* (West Point, N.Y.: Association of Graduates, USMA, 2005); United States Military Academy, “About the Academy,” <http://www.usma.edu/about.asp>; Wikipedia, “James McNeill Whistler,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_McNeill_Whistler; Jim Stokely, *Fort Moultrie: Constant Defender* (Washington: Department of the Interior, 1985).