
Defense Report

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ROTC is Alive and Well on College Campuses

Not long ago there were dire predictions that the Reserve Officer Training Corps programs on college campuses throughout the nation would be one of the several victims of Vietnam-based anti-military hysteria. Several prestigious Eastern Seaboard universities had withdrawn from the program at the insistence of militant faculty members and enrollments sagged ever-lower. There were attempts to sabotage ROTC facilities and the act of wearing an ROTC uniform on many campuses was a display of considerable courage.

Political scientists have always considered ROTC one of the great strengths of the U.S. military system. In the 111 years since the first ROTC unit was established the program has provided a steady flow of college-educated officers, both as careerists and for service during times of war. As the size of our permanent military establishment has grown ROTC has become the predominant source for regular officers. Those who tend to be critical of West Point, Annapolis and the Air Force Academy as supposed sources of an "officer clique" see the ROTC as a source of military leadership with its feet firmly planted in the American grass roots.

But if the program was wounded in Vietnam it has made a remarkable recovery. Total enrollment for the Army and Navy programs has gone up steadily since 1974 while the Air Force enrollment has been deliberately managed downward to meet that service's declining requirement for new officers. Several of the schools that dropped the program under pressure several years ago are now asking to get back into it, only to find that there is a waiting list.

One of the sub-phenomena associated with this resurgence is the number of women enrolling in ROTC. They began to show up in greater numbers for the 1973/74 school year and now the Army has almost 12,000 women in its program. They comprise 21 percent of the total enrollment. The Army reached a significant milestone last year when it commissioned 150 female graduates.

Remarkable, too, is the fact that this program growth has been accomplished with required ROTC enrollment in just 27 of the 493 ROTC units on U.S. campuses. Most of the schools with mandatory ROTC participation are military-oriented colleges.

It seems certain that this peculiarly American institution will continue to serve the nation at least as effectively as it has in the past. It has already produced men like George Catlett Marshall and several other Chiefs of Staff of the Army. Somewhere in the college ranks today there are others.