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## ROTC RETURNS

Cadets make a comeback on Ivy League campuses

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*The Vietnam War in context*

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## ARLINGTON REINVENTED

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY SINCE 1919



*Air Force ROTC cadet Andrew Hendricks adjusts his garrison cap at Yale University in New Haven, Conn. In 2011, Yale, Harvard and Columbia all signed agreements to restart ROTC units on campus. AP/Jessica Hill*

# THE RETURN OF

# ROTC

*Ivy League campuses welcome back military units after a decades-long hiatus.*

BY DOUG WISSING

The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) has a proud legacy within the U.S. military and on college campuses, where hundreds of thousands of cadets have trained since the program began in 1916.

Today, 70,000 ROTC cadets train on 300 host campuses and at several hundred cross-enrolled schools with ROTC programs. Nearly 40 percent of all officers commissioned passed through ROTC programs. But the story of ROTC on college campuses has many chapters – some triumphant, some tumultuous.

The latest was opened May 26, 2011, when Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus joined Yale President Richard Levin to re-establish a host Navy ROTC (NROTC) unit at the university after a 40-year hiatus that began in the turbulent Vietnam War era. In many ways, the Yale ceremony symbolized ROTC's enduring value to America.

Mabus praised Yale's alumni, who gallantly served in every U.S. war. He recalled that Yale formed a Navy air corps in 1917, the first university to do so, and in 1926 was one of the first six to establish a Navy ROTC unit.

"Navy blue and Yale blue have always been close together," he told the crowd.

Mabus also spoke of ROTC's value on campus, pointing out that when only 1 percent of Americans wear the uniform, "interaction with officer candidates in NROTC may be the only window into military life that many people at Yale will ever get."

Further, ROTC is important to the country, he said. "To best serve our nation, the military has to be reflective of the nation it serves, and it does not serve our country well if any part of the society does not share in the honor of its defense."

Military instruction on college campuses goes back to the American Revolution. When Yale students heard about the battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775, a company of student volunteers began drilling on the Connecticut campus. Yale student-soldiers were among the first to engage British troops when they landed in nearby West Haven on July 4, 1779.

In 1818, a former West Point superintendent, Capt. Alden Partridge, established the

American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy in Norwich, Vt. – known today as Norwich University – which formalized the idea of military instruction on civilian campuses. The concept spread to other institutions, including Virginia Military Institute and The Citadel. Founder Thomas Jefferson required that all University of Virginia students have military instruction, and by 1840 Indiana University and the University of Tennessee added compulsory military training.

The concept expanded dramatically when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862. Championed by Vermont legislator Justin Morrill, the act granted each state 30,000 acres of public land to establish institutions of scientific learning, with the provision that these land-grant colleges include military tactics courses in their curricula. By the end of the 19th century, 105 colleges and universities across the country offered military training.

In 1914, an influential group of pro-British American leaders were convinced that the United States would eventually enter the world war and formed the Preparedness Movement. They

lobbied for a national service program to train 18-year-old men in military tactics before assigning them to reserve units. Preparedness supporter and former President Theodore Roosevelt decried the “professional pacifists, poltroons and college sissies” who argued against the program.

The Plattsburg Movement, a volunteer nonenlistment training program organized by private citizens in Plattsburgh, N.Y., grew out of the Preparedness Movement. During the summers of 1915 and 1916, the Plattsburg Movement trained 20,000 professors, artists, lawyers, doctors, bankers, businessmen, clerks, diplomats, farmers and policemen to be potential Army officers – part of the 40,000 college alumni who eventually learned to march and shoot at Preparedness camps.

Harvard University graduate Gen. Leonard Wood was a leading proponent of the Preparedness Movement. After an illustrious career fighting Geronimo’s band and helping organize the Rough Riders in Cuba, Wood became Army chief of staff in 1910. In speech after speech, Wood insisted that failure to prepare for war was “brutal ... cowardly ... sinister.” During his service as chief of staff, Wood implemented several programs, including proto-ROTC units at civilian

colleges. Students and administrators at private and land-grant colleges alike clamored for officer training, with students at East Coast schools that included Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Dartmouth College successfully petitioning for military units.

The National Defense Act of 1916 codified many of the Preparedness Movement’s ideas, merging the National Guard, Army Reserve and regular Army into the Army of the United States. Officers came from colleges and universities, where they received military training under the aegis of a new institution: ROTC.

The system quickly took root, beginning in the Ivy League, a hotbed of the Preparedness Movement. Yale’s ROTC program began in the fall of 1916 with a field artillery unit. When the United States did enter World War I, there were already 90,000 ROTC-trained officers in the reserve pool, with many seeing active duty in 1917 and 1918. By the end of 1919, more than 130 institutions had ROTC units. More than 57,000 students were in Army ROTC (AROTC) programs in 1922.

In 1926, the beginning of NROTC programs at Harvard, Yale, Northwestern, Georgia Tech, Washington and California expanded the pool of

officer candidates. But in the small-army isolationist period between the wars, most active-duty commissions went to service academy graduates. Even future Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay couldn’t get an active-duty commission when he completed ROTC training at Ohio State in 1928, because there weren’t any vacancies. However, ROTC continued to produce the majority of reserve officers during those years – 80 percent in 1940, for instance, when 220 colleges and universities had programs.

Within six months of World War II breaking out, more than 56,000 AROTC officers reported for active duty, and more than 100,000 ROTC officers had served by the war’s end. ROTC-trained officers made a crucial difference in the early days of the war, when the U.S. military struggled with rapid mobilization. Gen. George Marshall wrote, “Just what we would have done in the first phases of our mobilization without (ROTC graduates) I do not know ... the cessation of hostilities on the European front would have been curtailed accordingly.”

In 1945, as strategists parsed the need for increased numbers of well-educated U.S. military officers to handle global Cold War challenges, Congress passed the ROTC

## NOTABLE ROTC ALUMNI



*“Without ROTC, I wouldn’t have had a military career. ROTC gave me my start in life, really. It’s done that for thousands.”*

**Gen. Colin Powell**, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and U.S. secretary of state. Powell is a 1958 graduate of the City College of New York’s ROTC program, at the time the nation’s second largest unit.

Vitalization Act, which institutionalized campus ROTC units. By 1955, there were programs on 313 campuses in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Welcomed by administrators, faculty and students who valued ROTC's instruction of civic duty, discipline and morality, the units were at public and private universities and colleges, including all of the Ivy League, Georgetown, Johns Hopkins and Stanford.

During the Korean War, the percentage of graduating cadets assigned to active duty skyrocketed. Through the 1950s, about 80 percent of graduating ROTC cadets became active-duty officers. But in the 1960s, the military and university communities began to count the costs, particularly of compulsory ROTC training still prevalent at land-grant universities.

The military saw soaring costs for a proportionally small harvest of career military officers – 20 students for every officer produced, according to one Air Force study. Burdened with increasingly demanding curricula, college administrators and students began to chafe at compulsory military training. Between 1961 and 1965, 60 Army and 59 Air Force ROTC units switched from compulsory to voluntary. As anticipated, rosters

plummeted. But when the officer shortfall was greater than expected, the military called for changes in ROTC.

In 1964, Congress passed an updated ROTC Vitalization Act to prepare the program to be the primary source of active-duty officers: a projected 75 percent of Army officers and 50 percent of Air Force officers. To address academic and military concerns, the ROTC curricula was revamped to be more in line with university education, a scholarship program was instituted, stipends were increased and the potential pool of cadets was broadened. As it turned out, the bill's most controversial debate related to campus drill, the anathema of many a harassed college student and the keystone of military training to many a veteran officer. Drill stayed.

When opposition to the Vietnam War flared on campuses in 1968, ROTC faced a new challenge. For the first time, university communities viewed ROTC units as outliers rather than the prestigious campus organizations they had been seen as since 1916. Between the congressional mandate to remain visible on campus, and the military requirement to maintain distance from antiwar protests, the ROTC officers were in a tough spot

during the late 1960s. One Michigan State military science professor claimed it was like being in “an embassy on foreign soil.”

ROTC enrollment dropped 25 percent from 1968 to 1969, when the draft lottery further hit ROTC. But even during that 1960s nadir, most university students were in favor of military training on campus – more than 75 percent at many schools. The bigger challenge came from university faculty councils demanding that ROTC courses adhere to the same academic criteria as the rest of the university or lose college credit. That issue changed the role of ROTC on U.S. campuses far more than anti-military students. Faced with ROTC's demotion to an extracurricular activity, the military began to close units in the Northeast, particularly at the Ivy League schools that had graduated tens of thousands of officers.

As the United States instituted a zero-draft military in 1973, ROTC continued to provide high-quality officers trained in a relatively economical university setting. In 1969, it cost on average \$4,320 to produce an ROTC officer, compared to \$8,320 in officer candidate school and \$47,136 in the service academies. Universities were also prepared to provide officers with the cultural training needed for the



**Kirk Douglas**  
Actor  
Notre Dame  
ROTC, 1944



**Samuel Alito**  
Supreme Court justice  
Princeton ROTC,  
1976



**Gen. Carl E. Mundy Jr.**  
Marine Corps commandant  
Auburn University  
NROTC, 1957

“hearts-and-minds” work that asymmetrical wars like Vietnam demanded.

With ROTC enrollments dropping overall through the 1970s, the military focused on the less expensive and more welcoming campuses of the South and the West, where senior officers thought the service branches could get more officer bang for the buck. ROTC expert Cheryl Miller, who heads the Program on American Citizenship at the American Enterprise Institute, says of high-cost Northeastern institutions, “The military doesn’t think about them as elite schools. They think of them as expensive schools.”

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the numbers of female and black ROTC cadets increased rapidly, producing a more diverse officer corps. And in 1993, Congress passed the law commonly referred to as “don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT), which allowed lesbians, gays and bisexuals to serve in the military so long as they did not reveal their sexual orientation. The bill also prohibited discrimination against closeted servicemembers or applicants.

From the law’s signing on Dec. 21, 1993, until its repeal on Sept. 20, 2011, DADT complicated ROTC, particularly in the Northeast, where universities cited the discrimination issue as justification for not hosting ROTC units.

“Harvard’s left-wing fringe just went up into orbit over ‘don’t ask, don’t tell,’” says retired Navy Capt. Paul E. Mawn, chairman of Advocates for Harvard ROTC. But the Solomon Amendment, which prohibited universities from banning ROTC or risk losing federal funding, tempered the anti-ROTC movement. In most cases, ROTC never completely left campuses; student cadets could join units at neighboring schools. For example, Harvard students went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for training, and Yale students to the University of Connecticut.

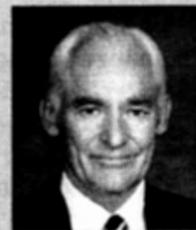
Nonetheless, for decades after the Vietnam War, there was scarce support for ROTC in the top universities, where military service had been a tradition.

Former President George H.W. Bush, a Yale graduate, attributed the transition to “cultural arrogance.” In 1956, 400 out of 750 Princeton graduates went into the service. By 2004, only nine Princeton graduates entered the military – and Princeton led the Ivy League. Stanford had 1,100 cadets in ROTC in 1956. In 2006, there were 29. The military was “just not on the radar of most undergraduates,” Mawn says.

When Yale ROTC graduate Flagg Youngblood went to the university in the 1990s, he was told to not wear his uniform to class. “The antiwar animus was still pretty strong on campus,” he says, adding that that sentiment changed after 9/11.

In 2010, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates spoke about the volunteer armed services and called for change: “This tiny sliver of America has achieved extraordinary things in the most trying circumstances. It is the most professional, the best educated, the most capable force this country has ever sent into battle.” Challenging ROTC to broaden its base, he warned of the risk of developing a cadre of military leaders that politically, culturally and geographically have less and less in common with the people they have sworn to defend.

The next year, when President Barack Obama announced the repeal of the ban on gays serving openly in the military, he said, “I call on all of our college campuses to open their doors to our military recruiters and the ROTC. It is time to leave behind the divisive battles of the past. It is time to move forward as one nation.” But times had already changed. The Ivy League was eager to welcome ROTC host units back, as the presidents of Harvard, Yale and Columbia had previously announced the restarts of their programs. The NROTC program announced for Rutgers University is the first in New Jersey since 1972.



**Sam Walton**  
Founder of  
Walmart  
University of  
Missouri ROTC,  
1940



**James Earl Jones**  
Actor  
University of  
Michigan ROTC,  
1955



**Alan Bean**  
Astronaut  
University of  
Texas NROTC,  
1955



**Kevin Greene**  
NFL linebacker  
Auburn University  
ROTC, 1984



*Students and ROTC midshipmen Evan Roth, left, Colin Dickinson and Catherine Philbin walk past Dunster House on the campus of Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass. ROTC programs are coming back to some Ivy League universities four decades after Vietnam War protesters cheered their departure. AP photo*

ROTC officially returned to Yale last fall. Annapolis graduate and helicopter pilot Lt. Molly Crabbe is the first NROTC officer assigned there in 40 years. “We have boots on the ground at Yale,” she says.

To get things started, she’s been commuting about 100 miles from her College of the Holy Cross office.

“I put on my Yale hat and go down there and try to get the program going,” she says. “The reception at Yale has been spectacular.”

Marine Capt. Chris Reinke serves with Crabbe at Yale, and echoes her assessment: “I walk around Yale in my Charlies and people say, ‘Thanks for being here,’” he says.

Yale student James Campbell is one of those who appreciates it. He’s already participating in an ROTC unit. “I’ll be happy to have more company,” he says with a laugh. A typical over-committed Yale student, Campbell says ROTC provides something that was missing in his college experience – and that he’ll somehow fit it into his schedule. “There’s not much going on at Yale at 5 a.m.,” he says.

The opening of new ROTC units is paradoxically coming at a time of declining military budgets and reduced officer needs. Cadet recruitment is dropping. “Nationally, the numbers are going down – rapidly,” says Reinke, citing the recession and the DoD budget. Indiana University AFROTC Commander Lt. Col. Jason Turner speaks of the Air Force chief of staff’s warning of “fiscal austerity.”

“With less resources, you buy fewer shiny toys and things that go boom, and you have less officers – ‘force strength,’ we call it,” Turner says. He’s seeing a healthy interest in ROTC, but the reduced numbers of officers are sobering for students. “Cadets are more realistic ... Their options in the military are narrowing.”

Through thick and thin, history has proven ROTC to be an essential element in the nation’s defense – and contemporary needs guarantee its future. The program is crucial for the military.

“It’s a source of officers, first,” says retired Gen. Colin Powell, the first ROTC graduate

to be named chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “It leavens the force – you get young people from all over the country. Without ROTC, I don’t know how we’d do it.”

ROTC also brings military personnel and ideals to sometimes insular universities. As Youngblood says, “It’s a visible reminder that academics need military willing to serve at the forward edge of freedom.”

Finally, ROTC continues to imbue generations of citizen-soldiers with the cultural and technical education vital for America’s global defense. Both the military and the academy benefit from the understanding and communication that only comes from proximity.

As Gates has said, “If America’s best and brightest young people will not step forward, who then can we count on to protect and sustain the greatness of this country in the 21st century?”

*Doug Wissing has written for National Geographic Traveler, ForbesLife and Gray’s Sporting Journal. He is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.*