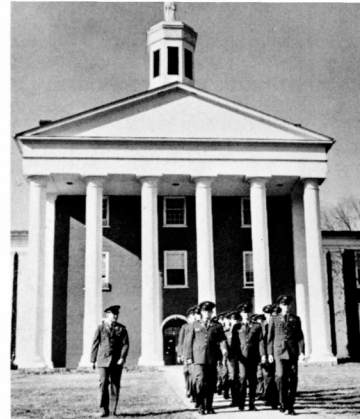


ROTC at W&L is experiencing resurgence in enrollment



The reports a few years back of the imminent demise of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program on America's college campuses seem, as Mark Twain said in another context, to have been greatly exaggerated.

Back when the war in Vietnam was "winding down" and the military draft was about to end, it was fashionable — and perhaps understandable — to expect that students would flock away from ROTC in droves.

And for a couple of years, that was the way it was.

But lately the nation has seen a resurgence of interest in ROTC training, for a number of complex reasons — reasons which can perhaps be seen in microcosm at Washington and Lee University, where the nationwide trend is reflected dramatically.

In the early 1970s, ROTC enrollment at Washington and Lee plummeted, as it did just about everywhere. At one point, the Army expressed concern about whether it would be practical to keep the program going at a large number of schools, including W&L.

But all that has changed. For two years now, the number of freshmen entering the ROTC program at W&L, as elsewhere, has jumped dramatically. Last year, freshman enrollment in ROTC at W&L doubled over the year before — and this year it increased again by 45 per cent over that figure.

The 54 freshmen in Washington and Lee's ROTC program this year represent 14 per cent of the 373-member freshman class. Total enrollment in the program at W&L is higher than it has been since 1970-71, when the spectre of the draft — rather than voluntary choice — persuaded substantial numbers of young men to enter the program.

But why? ROTC officials point out there are as many reasons as there are cadets. But many young men seem attracted to the program because of the state of the economy and because Army service is being viewed these days as an attractive option, either for a career or for a few years after college.

Starting salaries for second lieutenants, the rank at which a student enters the Army after completing the ROTC program at any college, are close to \$11,000 now. (The myth of the dirt-poor soldier went out with black-and-white movies.)

The more immediate benefits are important to many cadets too. Third- and fourth-year ROTC students receive a \$100-a-month paycheck and are eligible for generous Army scholarships which cover the full cost of tuition, books and fees. (The Army figures a four-year ROTC scholarship at W&L is worth more than \$15,000.) The scholarships are awarded competitively throughout the nation on the basis of academic talent; this year, about 30

per cent of W&L's ROTC students have won them.

And both the Army itself and the popular image of it have changed a good bit too. Many students have realized that some of the stereotypes, especially the ones that developed in the late 1960s, are pretty much inaccurate. ROTC students don't stand out in a crowd, as once they did, because of their haircuts, and they don't devote their lives to marching and drilling.

More and more, the Army seems not too different from any of the nation's other big employers. ROTC teachers say students are beginning to look at the program as a rather sophisticated management training program and "joining up" with Uncle Sam is pretty much the same as going with General Motors or U.S. Steel or Chase Manhattan or one of the big insurance companies. A man works under the same kind of two-way contract, with the same kind of responsibilities, privileges and job security.

"It appears," according to Lt. Col. Louis P. McFadden, the head of W&L's ROTC detachment, "that with the draft out of the way, young men are considering ROTC as one of their academic and career alternatives — when once it was merely an unpleasant way to avoid the draft."

