

by Jeffery G. Hanna

# ROTC Climbing Back at W&L

Not so very many years ago ROTC was a four-letter word on most college campuses.

As opposition to the war in Vietnam escalated during the late 1960s and early 1970s, enrollment in the Reserved Officer Training Corps dropped dramatically throughout the country. Washington and Lee was no exception. Like the ROTC programs almost everywhere, W&L's Army ROTC detachment hit bottom during the 1973-74 academic year when only 64 students were enrolled—a 62 percent decline from just three years previously. And consider this: in 1960, nine years after ROTC was established at the University, 364 undergraduates were enrolled in the program. The drop was precipitous indeed.

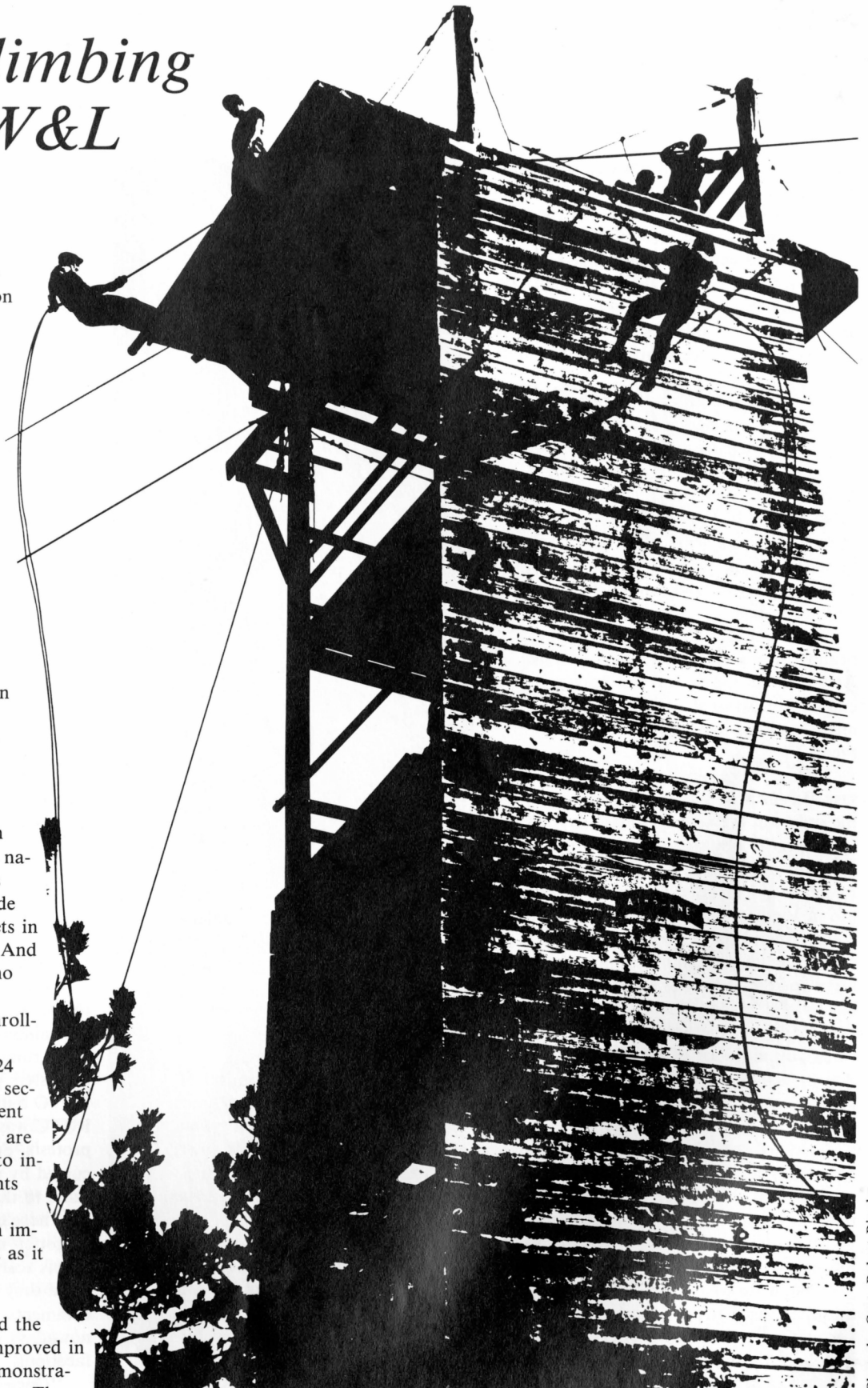
Today memories of Vietnam have faded. ROTC enrollments nationwide are climbing almost as dramatically as they fell a decade ago, from a low of 33,220 cadets in 1974 to a 1984 level of 72,823. And again, Washington and Lee is no exception.

This fall 192 students are enrolled in the University's program. W&L's ROTC officials expect 24 students to be commissioned as second lieutenants on commencement morning next June. Projections are for those numbers to continue to increase as more and more students gravitate toward the program.

Clearly, ROTC has made an impressive comeback at W&L just as it has throughout the country.

Why the about-face?

For starters, attitudes toward the military have unquestionably improved in the years since anti-Vietnam demonstrations swept the nation's campuses. The mood of the country has shifted percep-



*Rangers rappelling at Fort Bragg*

Photo by Capt. Robert Ripple

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tibly; there has been an obvious surge in patriotism.

But there are practical reasons for ROTC's return, too: increased tuition costs coupled with the availability of lucrative ROTC scholarships, for one; guaranteed post-graduate employment in an uncertain job market, for another; the prospect of draft registration, for yet another.

"I would like to say that patriotism is the number one reason for the increase in ROTC enrollments nationwide," says Lt. Col. Luke B. Ferguson, professor of military science at W&L. "But while I do believe many of the students become interested out of a sense of duty, I must honestly say the primary reason is probably monetary. Those scholarships are very appealing."

Those scholarships were no less appealing during the mid-1970s, of course. And yet that appeal was not strong enough to offset the negative feelings many students had about the military then.

"Those were black days for ROTC," says Ferguson. "Vietnam was probably the only war we've ever fought that was not supported by the public.

"For me personally it was a very difficult time. I invested two years of my life in Vietnam. I know that by the end of my second tour, I sensed a real concern over the continuing commitment of my own soldiers in the field. It was harder and harder. Being a loyal soldier you did it, but there were many evenings when you did a lot of soul-searching. In that kind of situation, I think you can begin to sense why the public felt as it did."

Many of today's ROTC cadets have only the vaguest memories of Vietnam—memories of the nightly television news reports, perhaps, but little more. And yet, they do sense how different the atmosphere is now.

"Knowing what I do about the atmosphere back then, I can't imagine that I would have been in ROTC had I been in college during Vietnam," admits Bob Tomaso, a senior from Milford, Mass., who is corps executive officer of the



Lt. Col. Luke Ferguson (left), professor of military science, presents colors to senior Greg Lukanuski.

W&L detachment this year.

Adds senior Greg Lukanuski of Mechanicsburg, Pa., the detachment commanding officer: "I don't want to say I wouldn't have ended up in ROTC back then, but the social pressures against going ROTC must have been awfully strong."

Perhaps those pressures were not as strong at Washington and Lee as they were elsewhere. ROTC units at some universities were disbanded under pressure from students and faculty. That never happened at W&L, but there was an ongoing debate over ROTC's existence at the University. That debate focused on

whether students ought to receive academic credit for their participation in the program with articles in and letters to the *Ring-tum Phi* arguing both sides of the case.

"The main objection to ROTC among a segment of the faculty was the fact that students received academic credit for a kind of study and learning that many felt was not appropriate to the liberal arts," recalls Louis W. Hodges, professor of religion at W&L.

"There were, at the same time, arguments that certain other kinds of study—physical education, for instance—should not earn credit either. But the argument against ROTC was heightened by the Vietnam War."

On the other side of the debate were those who argued that the presence of ROTC on a campus such as Washington and Lee was not only valid but vitally important.

"That side took the basic view that armies are dangerous, and it is not good for armies to be run altogether by people who have been trained strictly in the military," says Hodges. "It was felt that we would be far better off as a nation to have some liberally-educated military leaders. I suppose you could still hear both sides of that debate on campuses today, but the intensity of the debate was clearly a product of the overall climate of that period."

That debate was one sign of the times. Another sign came at the height of the campus unrest in the spring of 1970 when rumors abounded that anti-war protesters planned to set fire to W&L's ROTC building. Around the country ROTC was a popular target of the war protests. Some ROTC buildings were occupied by protesting students; it never came to that at W&L.

Those days of controversy are long forgotten now. Today uniformed ROTC cadets scarcely warrant a second glance when they walk across the campus. Any comments directed at the cadets nowadays are not so much derisive as facetious.

"Once in a while somebody will salute me or something like that when I'm in

uniform,” says Lukanuski. “But it’s really no big deal on the campus. Nobody’s ever called me a fascist or a baby killer because of the uniform.”

“Whenever a helicopter flies over the campus, one of my roommates will warn me to get used to that sound because I’ll be hearing it a lot in a couple of years,” says William E. (Hutch) Hutchinson, a junior member of the ROTC detachment from Providence, R.I.

The atmosphere and the attitudes have changed, to be sure. And in the meantime, ROTC has become an even more attractive alternative from a practical standpoint.

The extensive scholarship program is perhaps the major attraction. Of the 192 Washington and Lee students in ROTC this year, 65 are receiving one of the 16 different varieties of ROTC scholarships, most of which offer full tuition, fees, books, and \$100 a month in spending money.

“We have a larger proportion of students on ROTC scholarship than many schools,” notes Ferguson. “The scholarships are awarded on the basis of national competition, and our students tend to do quite well in that competition.”

According to Ferguson, the University received in excess of \$195,000 in scholarship monies from the government for a single semester in 1983-84.

“That is a major investment for us, but we think it is an investment well worth making,” says Ferguson, who took over this year from Lt. Col. David F. Fowler.

“I frankly wondered whether the scholarship would make that much difference to students here,” adds Ferguson. “But I’ve found that it does make a difference.”

Take Tomaso, for instance. Four years ago when he began looking at colleges, Tomaso’s father encouraged him to consider the service academies or, if not that, to look into the possibility of an ROTC scholarship.

“It had absolutely no appeal to me,” says Tomaso. “Even when I got to W&L and decided to take the first year of military science, I was not very enthused.

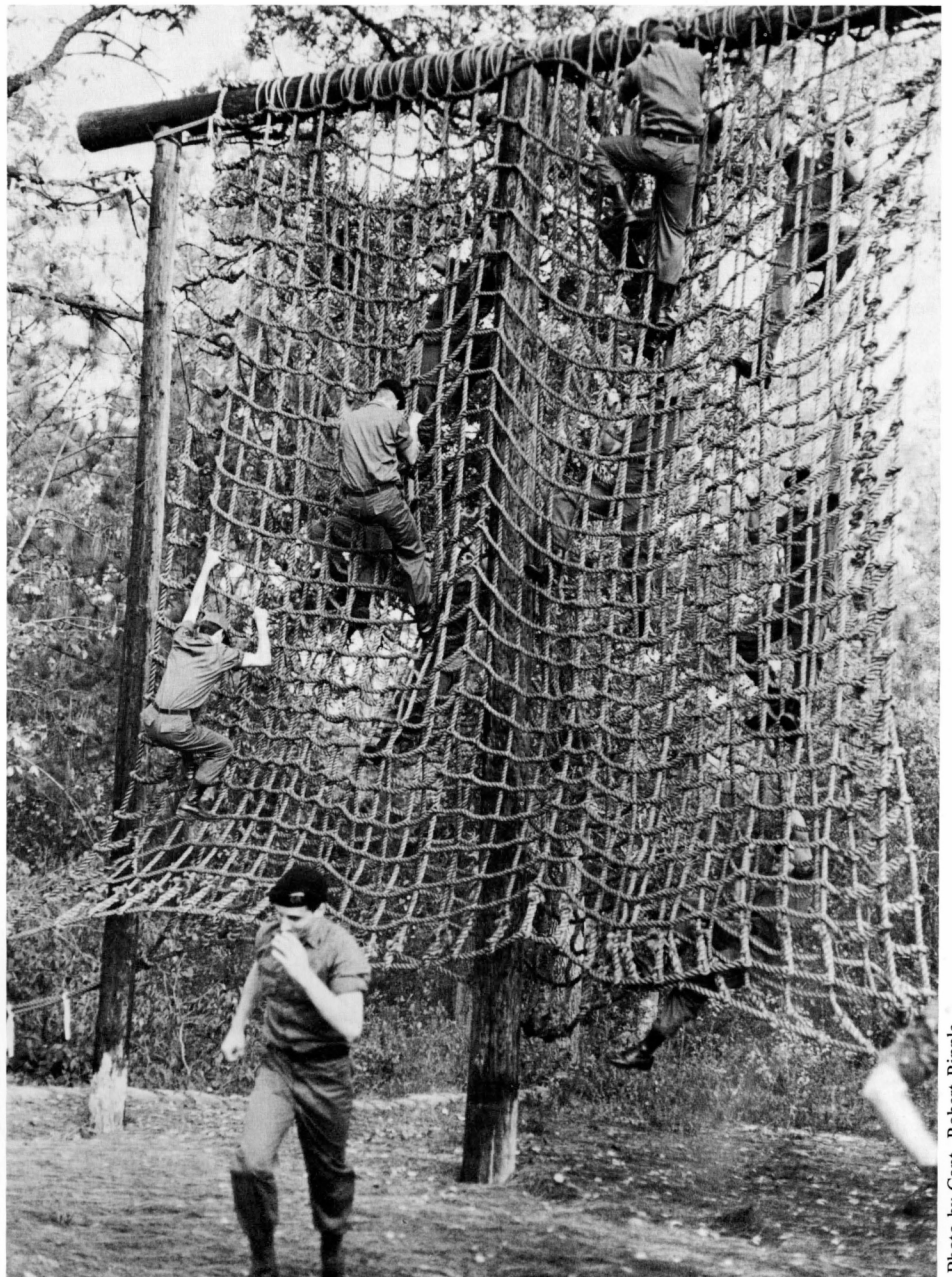
But Col. Fowler wiped out the stereotyped idea I had of the military, the nuts and bolts idea.

“I wound up applying for the scholarship. And I must admit that, to a large extent at least, I did it for the money.”

Tomaso chose one of the scholarships through which he will wind up spending six years in the Army Reserve after

finishing law school.

For others, the attraction of ROTC goes beyond the scholarship to the future. While his classmates scramble around this year getting their resumes printed and their interviews lined up, Lukanuski is sitting back and watching. He knows that next fall he’ll be employed by the U.S. Army at the



*Running the Fort Bragg obstacle course on a weekend retreat*

Photo by Capt. Robert Ripple

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\$19,000 entering annual salary of a second lieutenant. With that security, however, comes a commitment to four years of active duty.

"When I first began to consider committing myself to ROTC my father cautioned me to be certain that I wanted to put in those four years," said Lukanuski. "I really did think long and hard about that.

"I am not under the pressure that some of my classmates are to find a job. My goal is to end up as a military intelligence officer stationed in West Germany. I want to spend whatever free time I have traveling around Europe. If I'm going to be in the Army, I want to see all I can see."

In its recruitment campaign, ROTC emphasizes positive aspects of that four-year commitment, selling potential cadets on the fact that they will leave the Army with more marketable skills than they possessed when they entered.

"During my four years of active duty, I will increase my qualifications," says Hutchinson. "I think that I'll come out of the service ahead of my classmates in terms of experience. That should help me find a position that I want."

Is ROTC a valid career move? Michael Cappeto is the director of career placement at W&L. He does not hesitate to recommend ROTC to students with an interest in the military.

"It is my personal feeling that we need more liberally-educated people in the military rather than relying solely on the leadership of people who have spent four years training specifically for the military," says Cappeto. "I find that is not different at all from my belief that we need more liberally educated people in business. From that standpoint, ROTC does represent a valid option for some students."

Another practical reason more students are opting for ROTC involves the reinstatement of draft registration. That, says Ferguson, has been a factor in increased enrollments since students can eliminate the threat of having their careers interrupted.

"I remember one of the first ques-

tions I was asked by a prospective employer out of college was whether I had served in the military," says Ferguson. "There was the understandable concern then that a company didn't want to train you only to lose you to military service. ROTC allows the student to exercise control over the situation."

There are various other reasons students choose to participate in ROTC. Some see it as an adventure, a challenge.

"We do have students who are excited about the fact that they're going into a situation that is not routine, that they'll change jobs every two or three years," says Ferguson.

"And there are others who naturally gravitate toward the military because of family influences in that direction."

For whatever reason they choose ROTC, Ferguson finds the students come from an increasingly wide variety of backgrounds and bring an equally wide variety of viewpoints.

"I've been interested in coming up with a model of a prospective ROTC cadet at Washington and Lee," says Ferguson. "And what I have found is that we have an excellent cross section here. In the senior class, for instance, we've probably got less than 10 percent from military families. That our students

come from the whole range of backgrounds is, I think, important to the program."

But though they come to ROTC from different directions, W&L's ROTC students seem to be headed in similar directions. Most, according to Ferguson, are considering military intelligence while the second most popular post-graduate choice involves delaying active duty for law school and then entering the military as attorneys.

Ferguson acknowledges that the ROTC program's primary responsibility is to produce quality officers. He insists that is particularly critical given the complexities of today's military.

"It takes a different breed of officer to come in and lead a military unit today," he offers. "We have become so complex in our weapons systems and in our leadership dynamics that we must have officers who are able to handle these situations. More than ever we need to have leaders from schools such as Washington and Lee."

With the Army officer corps today, 75 percent received their commissions from the ROTC while the others were commissioned from West Point or Army officer candidate schools.

Not all of the W&L students who participate in ROTC are in the program for four full years. Indeed, the majority of the cadets are not headed toward the military commitment. For some, maybe even most, ROTC offers a chance to see, if only in a cursory way, what the military is all about—and the opportunity to get academic credits in the process.

The ROTC program is divided into two parts—the basic course and the advanced course. The basic course is for freshmen and sophomores. Worth five credit hours altogether, it introduces the students to management principles, national defense, military history, leadership development, and military courtesy, discipline, and customs.

The advanced course covers the final two years and includes a six-week advanced camp at Ft. Bragg, N.C. Instruction in that segment involves advanced leadership development, group dynamics,



Photo by Capt. Robert Ripple

Up the ladders

organization, and management, small unit tactics and administration, and the practical leadership that comes with assigning students as cadet officers.

Ferguson suggests that even instructing students who will not move beyond the basic course represents an important service not just to the University but to the public at large.

"I am not so naive as to believe the military is for everybody," Ferguson says. "But I do think that everyone needs to be aware of what the military is all about.

"I have an obligation, as does every other military officer, to educate the public. After all, we do work for the public. And I see ROTC as an excellent place to do that. Even if a student doesn't remain in the program the full four years, we've still done a service because we've educated that student on how the system works—some of the values, some of the traditions, some of the professional ethics. I think that is really important."

Ten years ago arguments raged over whether the purpose of ROTC was not antithetical to the avowed purposes of college education. For his part, Ferguson believes that W&L's ROTC program operates within the University's overall educational goals.

"We realize that education is primarily preparing a student for the decision-making process. We hope we're preparing these students to step out and lead," says Ferguson. "We counsel our students continuously. It is a requirement that every semester, the instructors sit down with each student. We strive to foster the same close student-professor relationship that is so crucial to the atmosphere of this University. We think we do belong."

And though they may have been drawn to the program for very practical reasons, many of the W&L cadets find that ROTC can complement the other facets of their educational experience.

"My participation in ROTC hasn't changed my philosophy at all in the sense that I'm still against killing people," Tomaso says. "But ROTC has instilled in me a sense of discipline.



*W&L's ROTC detachment in formation*

"I think it's important to note that you don't necessarily have to be a gung-ho military type to be in ROTC or to derive benefit from it. After all, I'm a member of ROTC and a member of the Frisbee Club at the same time."

Lukanuski credits his ROTC experience with improving his classroom work, particularly in the sense of helping him to mature.

"When I attended summer Advanced Camp at Fort Bragg, I was forced to realize that the time is coming, sooner than I might want to admit, when I'll be out on my own," said Lukanuski.

"There is the tendency in college to take things less seriously because you know you're still a kid, that the line between student and adult is there. This experience has forced me to cross that line before some of my classmates. And because of that I tend to take my school work more seriously now."

Most of the ROTC students look upon the program as one form of extracurricular activity and contend that it does not intrude on their time even on those occasions when they are off on an overnight field training exercise.

"I actually look forward to those overnights once a semester," says Hutchinson. "It is good to get away from the campus occasionally. It doesn't take up any of my study time. In fact, it might help me organize my time a bit better."

Some ROTC students are more active-

ly involved than others, taking advantage of the voluntary Ranger program which provides more field training opportunities.

Ferguson believes the interest will continue to grow for ROTC and expects the unit to benefit next year when the University's first women undergraduates arrive.

"Coeducation will have a very positive effect on ROTC here," says Ferguson. "Actually, we have been coeducational in a sense for several years since we have a cross enrollment with Lynchburg College, Liberty Baptist College, Hollins, and Randolph-Macon Woman's College. We have had several women participate in various aspects of the program.

"We are very excited about the prospect of women members of ROTC. Across the board a large number of the Army's female officers come from ROTC."

Ferguson is confident the popularity of ROTC will continue to increase and that the W&L detachment will produce more officers in the years ahead.

"Although I have a quota to produce a certain number of second lieutenants each year, I make only one promise: that I will produce *quality* lieutenants," says Ferguson. "That, I think, is the value of ROTC. And I think it is particularly valuable given the quality of the officers Washington and Lee has produced and will undoubtedly continue to produce."