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ROTC: THE UNIVERSITIES' STAKE IN NATIONAL DEFENSE (U)
APR 70 J W BITNER

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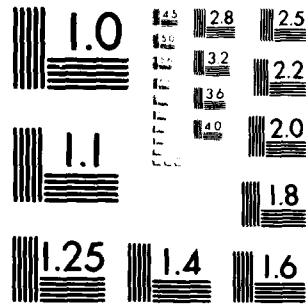
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6 ROTC: THE UNIVERSITIES' STAKE IN NATIONAL DEFENSE

A statement on the importance of an improved relationship between the ROTC and the universities.

10 By John W. Bitner Chairman, Princeton University
Joint Army-Navy-Air Force ROTC Advisory Council.

It is time for Americans--all Americans--to take a close look at what is happening to the Reserve Officers Training Corps: the downgrading, even the elimination of the program in some of the nation's leading universities. The results can be far more serious than most citizens realize.

The roots of concern go deep into the American's attitude toward the military. National defense is, of course, essential; and it had better be in the hands of intelligent, well-trained men. But the nation has no place for a dominant military elite. Its defenders must understand the aspirations and peaceful pursuits of a free, self-governing people. And it is precisely in this light that the ROTC provides a sensitive balance.

For more than fifty years our country's ROTC program has leavened our officer corps, contributing to the strength of the civilian community and maintaining a bridge between civilian and military life. It is, and has traditionally been, the largest single producer of officers for our armed forces.

Since national security requires a well-trained officer corps, the nation is better off by far if much of that corps is composed of men with the sound academic training, disciplined individual thinking and the understanding social outlook that our foremost colleges and universities can contribute.

The truth of this was significantly underlined by a recent special committee of civilian educators and military officers, commissioned by the Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird to study problems of the ROTC program. The committee and its advisory panel included not only two generals and an admiral, but also nine university presidents or chancellors and other men of considerable academic and administrative stature representing leading universities in all sections of the country. The members of this committee advised Secretary Laird a few months ago: "most American colleges and

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universities do have a responsibility to share in the defense of the free society of which they are a part. It is in their institutional self interest to contribute to the leadership of the armed forces." The committee also unanimously agreed that "If ROTC were to be removed from the nation's campuses there would be grave danger of isolating the services from the intellectual centers of the public which they serve and defend."

That grave danger is here and now. Faculty and administrative actions have already caused ROTC to be terminated at a number of leading universities. Several other universities are making it increasingly difficult--in some cases perhaps impossible--for the services to remain on campus. Last year Princeton reduced ROTC from departmental status, removed academic credit for course offerings, reduced the status of ROTC instructors, and imposed restrictions on them and their families with respect to schooling, housing and other matters. Here, as in certain other schools, the conditions imposed seemed to make the situation untenable for ROTC.

It is disturbing that the attacks on ROTC have originated mainly within the very intellectual centers that provide its relevance to the national civilian-military balance. These attacks are spearheaded by sincere but emotional individuals who use the ROTC as a symbol against which to demonstrate their moral aversion to the Vietnam war without seeing the program in its larger context; and by groups bent on generating mass disruption through the use of force to block and wreck the actions of all those with whom they disagree. They seem to disregard the possibility that there might come a time once again when the United States would be called upon to defend itself or perish--or to defend an ally whose cause they considered just. For these people, as for all of us, to eliminate ROTC is to deliver a hostage to fortune.

Since such opponents of ROTC may not regard themselves as shareholders in the university's responsibilities to our Nation's defense, the burden of these responsibilities falls rather upon the trustees, the administration, and a fully informed faculty--and, perhaps, dedicated alumni. It is to these groups that we must look for the assurance that decisions are made in mature and broad perspective, and only after full consideration of all relevant factors.

In military service, as in other professional disciplines, sound fundamental training and leadership qualities should be acquired early in life from experts; and for a career officer corps, these qualities are best acquired at a time when the young man's understanding of his world is being broadened in all directions: in the arts of living and thinking as well as in the skills of command. This is the unique function of the ROTC on the college campus.

To the extent that a school rejects ROTC, the school shrugs off the challenge of that unique function. Even more disturbing: it abandons a significant area of academic freedom: the right of a student to choose whether or not he will train for a military career at the same time he proceeds with his liberal academic education.

Thus may a university help to defeat its own purposes. The erosion of ROTC is a threat not to the military, but to those Americans who fear and distrust the control of our armed forces by a narrow military point of view.

It is in the Ivy Group universities that the chipping away at ROTC is most alarming. No man is an island; nor is any intellectual center an island unto itself. The policies and decisions of such schools as those in the Ivy Group are watched by other schools, both large and small, all over the nation. When ROTC is shackled or banished by one institution, it becomes easier for other institutions to rationalize similar action, and to hasten the day when ROTC may be finished at the bellwether schools-- and at others.

Officer Candidate Schools do not offer a satisfactory alternative to ROTC. Such commissioning programs are very useful when rapid expansion is needed in a national emergency. But the environment is not conducive to academic pursuits; the courses are brief; and in emergencies the faculties, quickly assembled, have no opportunity to relate the candidates to more than the restricted immediate objectives.

ROTC, on the other hand, embodies the strong asset of continuing contact between highly motivated military teaching staffs and critically-thinking, civilian-oriented faculties. Both bodies benefit from continued exposure to one another. None of the services believes that the OCS concept alone could satisfy the continuing officer procurement requirement.

The trend against ROTC programs can still be reversed. Early in 1970 Princeton, after new discussions with Army ROTC officials, relaxed some of its restrictions; and--as this is written--the Army will probably stay. The future of Air Force and Navy programs at Princeton is still in doubt; but there is at least an opening for reconsideration and negotiation by all the concerned parties.

This is the direction that all colleges and universities should be taking now: not capitulation to minority demands, frequently based on motives that are emotional though sincere; but a new examination of the function and the challenge of ROTC in the American pattern of freedom, security, and intellectual elbow-room.

Certainly there is ample room for re-examination of campus-ROTC relationships by men of good will representing both points of view. Let us then have new in-depth discussions between the colleges and universities where there has been a deterioration or cessation of ROTC on the one hand, and appropriate military department officials on the other: discussions which, with the best overall interests of our nation in mind, should be aimed at re-evaluation of how the academic world and our armed services can best relate in meeting the Nation's defense training problems of our armed services. And let's have these discussions before more damage--possibly irreversible damage--is done.

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