

PROVIDENCE COLLEGE



HISTORY DEPARTMENT

A.S.T.P. at Providence College

Thinking that the war might last from five to ten years a problem arose as to what type of professionals e.g. lawyers, doctors, dentists, etc would be available when peace returned. With this in mind Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Military Chief of Staff General George Marshall with the approval of President Franklin D. Roosevelt envisioned the "best and the brightest" soldiers who would also be given an opportunity to receive college level training. On December 18, 1942 the Army Specialized Training Program was approved and soldiers under the age of 22 (the draft had already been lowered to 18) were chosen to continue military training at various institutions of higher learning around the country. All told over 122 colleges participated in this program including Providence College.

In July, 1943 Major Howard Smith was assigned to lead the contingent here on campus. With the cooperation of Rev. Bernard A. McLaughlin in New York and Rev. John J. Dillon, O.P., President of the college together with the cooperation of the Rhode Island Congressional delegation and the Governor, J. Howard McGrath (Class of '27), plans had already been laid and the first soldiers began appearing in August of that year.

Most of the soldiers were billeted in Aquinas Hall (five

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to a room) while others stayed in Guzman Hall. They took their classes in Harkins Hall, drilled on the Hendricken Field baseball/football field, and exercised either in the gym at Harkins or the training field which is now Slavin Center and Alumni Hall.

The program was hugely successful as the faculty worked constantly to update the curriculum, the neighbors and, indeed, the whole city of Providence began a love affair with its "citizen soldiers" and the A.S.T.Pers themselves seemed to enjoy their new environment. The first class of 20 graduated on January 28, 1944 with all due pomp and ceremony and the program appeared to be in full bloom. That was until a memo was issued by Brigadier General Thomas E. Troland, Commander Army Service Forces sent from Boston, Massachusetts dated February 19, 1944. It read in part "The time has come for the majority of you to be assigned to other active duty." It went on to say "Your intelligence, training, and high quality of leadership are expected to raise the combat efficiency of those units."

The conclusion was obvious as the invasion of Europe was fast approaching and thousands of combat trained soldiers were vitally necessary. The program was shut down and after a going away party hosted by the college on March 19, 1944 the over 500 A.S.T.Pers would march downtown to the old Union Station. They shipped out to an uncertain future and the rest is history.

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Your presence helped preserve the future of the college which was about to close for lack of students; your presence established the foundation for a permanent R.O.T.C. started during the Korean War and which is today considered one of the best in the country.

To those whose names appear on this plaque we honor you; to those who could not be here today for one reason or another we remember you; to those of you who are our guests today we say "Welcome home and thanks for what you did."

To most people the letters A.S.T.P. stand for Army Specialized Training Program but here at Providence they also stand for two other things:

A.S.T.P.=A Super Type Patriot

A.S.T.P.=Always Special to Providence

God love you all

Robert L. Deasy,
Assoc. Professor of History

Army Specialized Training
Program Troop Return Oct. 17, 1998
Program Draft