



Photo Op/Story Idea

Providence College ASTP Unit Dedicates Plaque Honoring Fallen Comrades in Ceremony on October 17, 1998 at 12 noon in Slavin Center '64 Hall

Providence, RI — In the spring of 1943, some 380 soldiers – among the nation’s best and brightest military draftees – were assigned to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at Providence College. The Army paid their room, board and tuition costs while they attended classes in mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, geography and English, taught by the college’s Dominican faculty, that ran simultaneously but separately from the college’s normal curriculum. The soldiers were billeted in Aquinas Hall and used the college’s athletic fields for training exercises.

The goal of the program, initiated by Secretary of War Henry Stimson and conducted at more than 120 colleges and universities throughout the nation, was to provide specialized training to prepare these soldier-scholars for military tasks in engineering, mathematics, medical/dental areas and foreign languages, while ensuring skilled and well-educated professionals would be available after the war ended.

In March of 1944, the program was abruptly canceled and the soldiers were reassigned to the 328th infantry regiment of the 26th Yankee Division. The War Department had determined that the soldiers enrolled in the program, whose presence at Providence College had enabled the college to continue operating, were needed to reinforce troops stationed at the front lines.

One of the soldiers, George Fisher, recalls, “We survivors have nothing but pleasant memories of our brief six month stay at Providence College. However, the ASTP program was a sham. We were promised an education, officer status and four years of college. One night, about 2 a.m., our entire company was awakened and told to pack our clothes and leave our books behind. After six days of riding in a windowless train, we were all dumped in the mud fields of Tennessee to join a seasoned infantry division. We all knew what it felt like .. going from heaven to hell! We then trained with the division, went overseas and fought the enemy from October 1944 to the end of the war in April 1945. All of us were on active duty, including the Battle of the Bulge, the bloodiest battle of the war.”