



(Photo by Levon Biss, U.S. Army)

U.S. Army Cadet Command promotional photo shoot at the University of North Georgia, 26 September 2013.

Army ROTC at One Hundred



Paul N. Kotakis

The program that produces the majority of commissioned officers for America's Army marks an important milestone this year: Its one hundredth birthday. The Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program was formally established by the National Defense Act of 1916.¹ Since then, it has produced two chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, an astronaut, and seven Army chiefs of staff.² Among its

graduates are also two former secretaries of state and a sitting Supreme Court justice.³ And, with over six hundred thousand graduates to its credit, Army ROTC arguably can be said to have had a lasting impact on virtually all elements of American society.⁴

The manner in which the program has kept pace with the ever-changing needs of the Army presents an interesting study of organizational behavior. The

adaptability of the Army ROTC program belies the notion that large organizations are prone to becoming staid and hidebound.

A comprehensive understanding of ROTC's impact on the American profession of arms begins with an examination of its origins. The antecedents of the Army ROTC program may be found in events nearly a century before then President Woodrow Wilson signed the National Defense Act of 1916.

The notion of providing quality precommissioning military education on American college campuses is as old as the Nation itself. In 1783, George Clinton, a senior political leader and then governor of New York, advocated making military education available at one civilian college in each state of the Union. Under Clinton's proposal, upon completion of their studies, graduates would be commissioned and serve for a brief period on active duty. Upon their return to civilian life, these officers would become the nucleus of an expanded Army during times of national emergency. Given the multiple competing priorities then facing the new nation, however, no substantive action was taken on Clinton's proposal.⁵

The Role of Alden Partridge

No proper accounting of the origins of American collegiate military training is complete without recognizing the pivotal role of Capt. Alden Partridge. In 1819, Partridge, who served as U.S. Military Academy superintendent, established the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy in Norwich, Vermont.⁶ That institution, known today as Norwich University, is widely recognized as the birthplace of the ROTC program and the *citizen-soldier*.

Under the concept of the citizen-soldier, men were to be trained on campus for future service as military leaders. Under the Partridge model, such officers would be "identified in views, in feelings, and in interests,

with the great body of the community."⁷ The academic institution envisioned by Partridge would "reconcile the efficiency and discipline demanded by a regular army with the republican values and popular sentiment inherent in the militia system."⁸ Most graduates would serve in the militia, and some in the regular army, thus improving the overall quality of the officer corps.

Partridge garnered national fame for his efforts to transform the traditional college curriculum by making



(Photo courtesy of Norwich University)

ROTC cadets from Norwich University conduct marksmanship training in 1938.

it more practical, scientific, and relevant to modern life. As ROTC's subsequent history illustrates, the ongoing effort to improve the curriculum for new officers has remained at the forefront.

The Partridge educational model was fully in place at a number of academic institutions before the outbreak of the American Civil War. University of Virginia founder Thomas Jefferson required all students there to participate in military-oriented instruction. Both the Virginia Military Institute and The Citadel embraced his concept. Indiana University and the University of Tennessee had established compulsory military training by 1840.⁹

The Land Grant College Act of 1862

Partridge's pioneering approach contributed to the concepts embodied in the Land Grant College Act of 1862, also known as the Morrill Act.¹⁰ Introduced by



(Photo courtesy of Cushing Memorial Library)

Texas A&M University cadets conduct field artillery training, circa 1941.

Vermont Rep. Justin S. Morrill and signed by President Abraham Lincoln, the act granted each state thousands of acres of public land for establishing institutions that would teach subjects in support of agriculture and industry. To receive this valuable offer of land, colleges were required to include military tactics courses in their curricula.¹¹

Citizen-soldiers from these land-grant institutions joined those already educated in the Partridge model serving in the Confederate and Union forces. Lee's surrender at Appomattox in 1865 did not mark the end of the continuing effort to provide military instruction on college campuses. By 1893, the legislature had authorized one hundred officers for detached duty as college instructors, and by the turn of the century, forty-two institutions were teaching military subjects.¹² As of 1900, most land-grant colleges required men to complete one year of military training.¹³

With the conclusion of the Civil War, activities of the Army were primarily focused on the American frontier. After defeating Spain in the Spanish–American War in 1898, the United States emerged with new territories to administer in the Philippines and the Caribbean. However, the Army was still quite small compared to the forces of the other Great Powers.

The “Plattsburg Idea” is another important antecedent of today's Army ROTC program. In 1913,

then Army chief of staff Gen. Leonard Wood introduced experimental summer camps to train potential Army officers, starting at Pacific Grove, California, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Wood and other American leaders formed what would become known as the Preparedness Movement to advocate a strong national defense. The movement recognized the standing U.S. Army was too small to be

immediately effective if America entered World War I. In 1915, Wood added a larger camp at Plattsburg, New York, which became a model for training. Over seventeen thousand men had received training at these camps by the end of 1915.¹⁴

The National Defense Act of 1916

The signing of the National Defense Act of 1916 brought into existence Army ROTC units that closely resemble the college-based Cadet Command formations of today. World War I ended in 1918, and the program became permanently established by 1919. Students and administrators at private and land-grant colleges clamored for officer training. Prestigious academic institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Dartmouth successfully petitioned for military units. From 1919 to 1920, Army ROTC training enrolled 57,282 students and produced 133 officers. A year later, more than fifty-four thousand men had enrolled in the program, which produced 934 officers.¹⁵ The numbers increased annually for the next fifteen years.

A foreign policy of isolationism and the resulting decision to maintain only a small standing army did not portend well for advocates of combining a military education with a traditional college experience. Most active-duty commissions were reserved for service

academy graduates. For ROTC graduates, the competition for a place in the active component was intense.

Army ROTC and World War II

During the years before the Pearl Harbor attack, Army ROTC produced the majority of reserve officers. These ROTC-trained leaders made a crucial difference in the early days of World War II, when the nation struggled to achieve rapid mobilization. In a 1943 report, Gen. George Marshall, then chief of staff of the Army and a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute ROTC program, pays tribute to these officers:

The procurement of suitable officer personnel was fortunately solved by the fact that during the lean, post-war years, over 100,000 Reserve officers had been continuously trained, largely the product of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. These Reserve officers constituted the principal asset available which we possessed at this time.¹⁶

Without these officers, the successful rapid expansion of our Army would have been impossible.

Post-World War II Developments

At the war's end in 1945, the United States began a period of rapid demobilization. However, the emerging Soviet threat quickly sparked renewed emphasis on populating the officer corps with Army ROTC graduates. The hostilities on the Korea Peninsula that began in the summer of 1950 further increased the need for a strong ROTC program. By the mid-1950s, the Army ROTC program was producing more than twelve thousand lieutenants annually.¹⁷

The ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964 solidified ROTC's status as the primary source of active duty Army officers.¹⁸ The ROTC program of instruction was revised, and a scholarship program was instituted. Cadet stipends were increased, and the potential pool of cadets was broadened. Around the same time,



(Photo courtesy of Pittsburg State University [Kansas] ROTC)

Pittsburg State University cadets hone their cold weather and team building skills in spring 2015, at Camp Crowder, Missouri.

however, some military and university leaders began to question the requirement that all able-bodied males at land-grant institutions participate in ROTC. Simultaneously, antiwar sentiments resulting from U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War were adversely affecting ROTC operations.

After World War II, all males in the United States were subject to compulsory military service. Those enrolled in ROTC were granted deferments while in school, which enhanced interest in the program. In 1969, however, when the Selective Service conducted a lottery that determined the order in which men were subject to involuntary military service, ROTC's popularity began to wane. The new lottery method did not offer deferments for ROTC cadets.¹⁹

Army ROTC enrollment declined precipitously when the draft ended in 1973. But, on a positive note, during school year 1972–1973, female college students became eligible to enroll in Army ROTC as part of a pilot program. In school year 1975–1976, the first group of women earned their commissions through Army ROTC.²⁰

The Establishment of Cadet Command

Perhaps the most significant development in Army ROTC's proud history was the decision to establish Cadet Command. Formed at Fort Monroe, Virginia,

Service is never about self. It extends to others—to those we are helping, to those we are protecting, to those we are defending.

-Gen. Mark Milley

in 1986, Cadet Command assumed responsibility for the nearly two hundred thousand students then participating in the college- and high school-level Army ROTC programs.²¹ Maj. Gen. Robert E. Wagner, its initial commander, immediately set the new organization on a path of transformation. Within a few years of Cadet Command's formation, Army ROTC improved in many ways. Wagner stressed the importance of a common standard for on-campus instruction and added rigor to the summer camps that had long been a feature of ROTC. Among Wagner's many innovations was the establishment of a resident training course for newly assigned ROTC cadre that became known as the School of Cadet Command.²² Wagner further refined the methodology that measured each cadet's leadership potential.

Recent Innovations

The superb quality of ROTC-trained officers has won high praise from many quarters since the onset of the Global War on Terrorism. In 2002, President George W. Bush addressed the George C. Marshall ROTC Award winners at Virginia Military Institute, whom he said represented “the best of our country and the best future for the United States Army.” Bush said the award-winning cadets stood out

among the nearly thirty thousand young Americans who are today enrolled in the Army ROTC; the officers who will serve in the military of the future, and one day will lead it. For nearly ninety years, this great program has developed leaders and shaped character. Those looking for idealism on the college campuses of America will find it in the men and women of the ROTC. ROTC's traditions and values are a contribution and a credit to every college and every university where they're found.²³



(Photo courtesy of Princeton University)

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley addresses convocation 20 February 2016 after receiving Woodrow Wilson Award, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

Bush also noted former U.S. Army Gen. Colin L. Powell, a graduate of the City College of New York Army ROTC program, was serving in the Bush administration as secretary of state. Bush shared with the audience views Powell reportedly expressed about his time as a cadet: “The order, the self-discipline, the pride that had been instilled in me by our ROTC prepared me well for my Army career or, for that matter, any career I might have chosen,” said Powell.²⁴

In the years since Bush's address, Cadet Command has continued refining its training methodologies and its approach to leader development. For example, all the collective summer training conducted by Cadet Command was consolidated at Fort Knox in 2014. New hands-on training opportunities became available to all cadet underclassmen for the first time. More plentiful opportunities for cadets to gain familiarity with other nations now exist than ever before.

Cultural awareness training has become a vital component of the Army ROTC curriculum. Overseas immersion helps educate future leaders in ways the classroom cannot. Cadets selected for these opportunities gain first-hand experience with different cultures and sharpen their foreign language skills. They work side-by-side with host-nation military forces, and they have unmatched opportunities to learn more about the culture and history of the nations to which they are sent. In 2014, 1,320 ROTC cadets participated in this experience.²⁵ In the future, at least half of all cadets are expected complete an overseas immersion internship.

Cadet Command has brought significant improvements to the high school program, including extensive revision of the curriculum. The number of JROTC units increased significantly while Powell was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. With its focus on building better citizens, JROTC now touches the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people each year.

A New Century of Service

The challenges currently facing America's Army are far different from those it had to address when the ROTC program first came into existence. However, as ROTC prepares to enter its second century, it is well



(Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Cadet Command)

Army ROTC cadets conduct small boat training 18 July 2008.

positioned to continue providing the talented leaders the Army needs.

For the seventh time in U.S. history, an ROTC-trained officer serves as chief of staff of the Army. Gen. Mark Milley is a 1980 graduate of the Princeton University Army ROTC program. On 20 February 2016, Milley was presented the 2016 Woodrow Wilson Award by his alma mater. Princeton bestows the award annually to a former undergraduate whose career reflects the concepts in Wilson's 1896 speech, "Princeton in the Nation's Service." Upon receiving the award, Milley explained why he chose to serve in the Army after completing his studies at Princeton. He offered his views on the importance of service: "Service is never about self. It extends to others—to those we are helping, to those we are protecting, to those we are defending. This bond created through service extends to the brothers and sisters who are wearing the uniform."²⁶

Referring to the rights of free citizens, Milley noted America's Army is powerful because it protects "the most powerful idea that has ever existed in world history."²⁷ As the Army's thirty-ninth chief of staff, and a product of the Army ROTC program, his words echo the sentiments of countless others within the profession of arms. And it is quite reasonable to believe they would resonate well with Alden Partridge and President Woodrow Wilson too. ■

Biography

Paul N. Kotakis is the special assistant to the U.S. Army Cadet Command chief of public affairs. He has served with the U.S. Army Cadet Command since 1986, including as the command's public affairs officer and the deputy director of marketing and outreach. He received an undergraduate degree in history and an ROTC commission from Washington University in Saint Louis, and an MA from Webster University. Kotakis served in a variety of command and staff assignments in Europe and the United States.

Notes

1. National Defense Act of 1916, Pub. L. No. 64-85, 39 Stat. 166 (1916).
2. Generals Colin Powell and Hugh Shelton served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Col. Nancy Jane Currie-Gregg was a NASA astronaut. Former and current Army chiefs of staff include Gen. of the Army George C. Marshall Jr. and Generals George H. Decker, Fred Weyand, Gordon Sullivan, Peter Schoomaker, George Casey, and Mark Milley.
3. Former secretaries of state are Dean Rusk and Colin Powell. Justice Samuel Anthony Alito, Jr. serves on the U.S. Supreme Court.
4. Stand-To!, "Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps," U.S. Army website, 2 December 2015, accessed 24 March 2016, http://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2015-12-02/.
5. Hugh Hastings, *Public Papers of George Clinton: First Governor of New York, 1775-1795 and 1801-1804* (Albany: State Legislature Printer, 1899-1914), vol. VII: 145-46; Arthur T. Coumbe, Lee S. Harford, and Paul N. Kotakis, *U.S. Army Cadet Command: The 10 Year History* (Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, 2010), 7-8.
6. "History of Norwich University," Norwich University website, accessed 24 March 2016, <http://about.norwich.edu/legacy/history/>.
7. Alden Partridge, "National Defence [sic]," lecture at Windsor, Vermont, June 1841, synopsis found in *New York Military Magazine: Devoted to the Interests of the Militia throughout the Union*, Vol. I (New York: LaBree & Stockton, 1841), 303, accessed 24 March 2016, <https://books.google.com/books?id=c-0c5AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA303&lpg=PA303&dq=Partridge,+identified+in+views,+in+feelings+and+interests,+with+the+great+body+of+the+community.&source=bl&ots=mfdadY8f-wu&sig=wwE6SGkO3QNXFYswA4zlew6V4A0&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj61Luc3dnLahWJ7yYKHcacBq8Q6A-EIODAG#v=onepage&q=Partridge%2C%20identified%20in%20views%2C%20in%20feelings%20and%20interests%2C%20with%20the%20great%20body%20of%20the%20community.&f=false>; Coumbe, Harford, and Kotakis, *U.S. Army Cadet Command: The 10 Year History*, 7-8.
8. Coumbe, Harford, and Kotakis, *U.S. Army Cadet Command: The 10 Year History*, 8.
9. *Ibid.*, 7-8.
10. Morrill Act, Pub. L. No. 37-108, 12 Stat. 503 (1862); Coumbe, Harford, and Kotakis, *U.S. Army Cadet Command*, 9.
11. Coumbe, Harford, and Kotakis, *U.S. Army Cadet Command*, 9.
12. *Ibid.*, 9-10.
13. *Ibid.*, 10.
14. *Ibid.*, 13.
15. *Ibid.*, 300.
16. George C. Marshall, *Biennial Reports of the Chief of Staff of the United States Army to the Secretary of War: 1 July 1939-30 June 1945* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1996), 9, accessed 24 March 2016, http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/070/70-57/CMH_Pub_70-57.pdf.
17. Coumbe, Harford, and Kotakis, *U.S. Army Cadet Command*, 301.
18. Reserve Officers' Training Corps Vitalization Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-647, 70A Stat. 119 (1964).
19. "The Vietnam Lotteries," Selective Service System website, accessed 1 April 2016, <https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/Lotter1>.
20. Coumbe, Harford, and Kotakis, *U.S. Army Cadet Command*, 301.
21. *Ibid.*, 299-305.
22. *Ibid.*, 114.
23. George W. Bush, "President Outlines War Effort" (remarks by the president to the George C. Marshall ROTC Award Seminar on National Security, Virginia Military Institute, 17 April 2002), accessed 24 March 2016, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/04/text/20020417-1.html>.
24. Colin L. Powell, quoted in George W. Bush, "President Outlines War Effort."
25. "The Cadet Command Cultural Understanding and Language Proficiency Program," U.S. Army Cadet Command website, accessed 25 March 2016, <http://www.cadetcommand.army.mil/culp/>.
26. Gen. Mark Milley, quoted in Kristin Qian, "General Mark Milley '80 Talks Service at Alumni Day," *The Daily Princetonian*, 21 February 2016, accessed 24 March 2016, <http://dailyprincetonian.com/news/2016/02/general-mark-milley-80-talks-service-at-alumni-day/>.
27. *Ibid.*