

# Campus once influenced by military presence

*As students trained on campus for military service, university faced financial hardships*

**Steve Earley**

Reporter

Whether or not the U.S. decides to go to war with Iraq, Elon's campus should look relatively the same.

However, during World War I and World War II, the college was a different place. The wars suspended all athletic programs and stopped the presses of the school's yearbook.

In 1918, the Students' Army Training Corps, a nationwide program initiated by the war department during WWI, nearly 112 male students were enlisted in military training. The soldiers-to-be completed Elon's traditional liberal studies classes, with courses ranging from public hygiene to foreign languages to military law and practice.

## SATC presents problems

Dr. Earl Danieleley, the college's sixth president and 1946 graduate, said the sudden departure of fellow classmates left a sad void on campus.

"Students were with you in class one week and then the next they were ... killed in action or missing," Danieleley said. He added that some young faculty members were called for military duty as well.

The induction ceremony for the trainees was delayed four days because of an outbreak of Spanish influenza, a highly contagious respiratory infection.

The flu paralyzed activity within the campus community. Suddenly, the war was not the college's greatest concern.

More than 300 cases of sickness were reported at Elon, and three deaths were attributed to the flu. Due to limited medical personnel, the students who were not sick cared for the ill.

Military students rose at 5 a.m. to do calisthenics before breakfast and then drilled from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Drill instructors often issued loud commands and strings of profanity in the morning hours.

These drills sometimes awoke and offended civilian students.

"The use of such language on the campus of a Christian institution



Kathleen Frey / Photographer

*The campus has undergone major changes since WWI and WWII. The Long building stands where soldiers once marched.*

was not conducive to the best relations between the civil and military leaders at Elon," observed one enlisted student in *Elon College: Its History and Traditions* written by Durward T. Stokes.

A change in SATC leadership patched up relations. The military program gradually achieved a harmonious relationship with the rest of the college. Students were eager to engage in military drills as a supplement to their physical education requirements.

Nearly one month after the SATC began at Elon, the war ended. Though the government supplied uniforms, guns and instructors, the program's expense left the college \$4,896 in debt.

## Elon asks military for help

With the Depression right around the corner, Elon's road to financial recovery was bumpy. World War II took the nation out of an economic crisis and claimed potential college students. By November 1942, Elon's student enrollment decreased from 661 to 475.

The school turned to the military to boost its student population. Elon President Leon Edgar Smith wrote a letter to a North Carolina senator offering training space on campus.

"We shall have a lot of vacant space that could be used to further

the war effort," said Smith. "At Elon College we can take care of two to four hundred trainees for the government."

On April 22, 1943, 250 trainees of the 325th College Training Detachment arrived at Elon. Military students again completed an academic portion, taught by Elon faculty, and military program. The five-month, 700-hour program included 10 hours of flying time completed at nearby army bases.

Unlike the SATC, which eventually blended with the civilian community, a distinct separation divided the air corps and the rest of the college. The east side of campus was a "military reservation," leaving the west side to civilian students. The groups were required to stay on their respective sides except during certain periods on the weekends.

"Men who were there as part of the air corps group became, in a sense, an integral part of campus life. They had classes with other students, ate meals together, and slept in the same dormitories," Danieleley said.

Like SATC students, air corps members had a different schedule than regular college students. Trainees often woke up at 5:30 a.m. and went to bed at 9:30 p.m.

The impact of World War II permeated on-campus clubs and organizations. In January 1942, a "V for Victory" club was established to

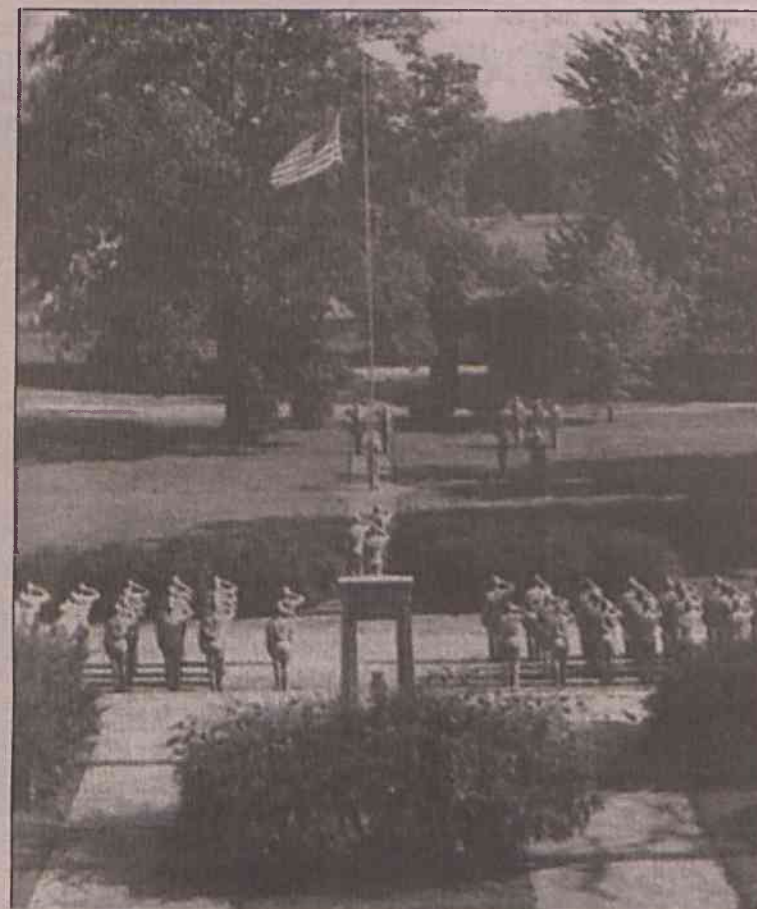


Photo Submitted

*Soldiers salute during a military ceremony near the O'Kelly Monument, on the south campus, during World War II.*

support the war effort. In March, the Elon College Air-Raid Organization supervised the school's first air-raid drill.

The flux of military students from all over the country significantly altered Elon's religious demographics. Services for Catholics and Jews were held by visiting priests and rabbis. This marked the first time non-Protestant services were held on campus.

Elon became the first college in North Carolina to suspend its athletics program due to a decrease in player participation and audience attendance.

## Road to recovery

The school could not afford to hire outside labor for the upkeep of the campus. Danieleley said he remembers late autumn days spent with classmates raking leaves and burning them.

"The increase in financial resources has made it possible to have new buildings and new activities," Danieleley said.

A total 672 pilots trained at Elon. The air corps program became a "financial life-saver," according to Smith. The army paid the college \$166,263—mostly in cash.

After the G.I. Bill of Rights was passed by Congress in 1944, the college started down a path of permanent financial recovery.

The bill guaranteed payment by the government for the tuition, books and supplies of returning soldiers. This ensured that most of the students who left for war came back. In the 1945-46 academic year enrollment rose to an all-time high of 678 students.

*Background information for this article was found in *Elon College: Its History and Traditions* written by Durward T. Stokes and published in 1982.*

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