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## COLLEGE EDUCATION AND THE MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAM

*Thomas M. Pearce*

**R**ECENT STATEMENTS by high officials of the Army support the view that some type of universal military training will be enacted in the post-war United States. On July 21, 1943, Brigadier General John McAuley Palmer wrote in the *Infantry Journal*, "It is clear that there can be no sound military organization that does not rest upon the principle that, in his youth, every able-bodied American should be trained to defend his country." Palmer proposes a civilian commission to correlate the interests and plans of the Army, Navy, and Air Forces into a co-ordinated policy for defending this country and for fulfilling its obligations to friendly allied nations.

On July 29, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in a radio talk, outlined a broad program for the return to civilian life of men and women in the armed services. Among his proposals, he recommended "an opportunity for members of the armed services to get further education or trade training at the cost of their government." The returning soldier, sailor, and marine are a part of the problem of shifting millions of Americans who have been working and living in a war economy back to civilian pursuits. "While concentrating on military victory," the President said, "we are not neglecting the planning of the things to come, the freedoms which we know will make for more decency and greater justice throughout the world."

In combination, the ideas of General Palmer and President Roosevelt offer a program supported by the government to bring thousands of men back to American colleges, universities, and other training institutions where educational opportunities will be combined with the program of compulsory military training. Some of these men will be trained for permanent service in the Armed Forces. All of them will be given training basic for war service if need should ever call them from civilian life.

A few weeks before these pronouncements by General Palmer and President Roosevelt, a letter came to me from one of my former students, now an ensign in the Navy. The mailing address was the Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, which meant that the author was somewhere in the Pacific. While this young man was enrolled at the University, he had specialized in courses offered by the departments of government and English. He had published short stories in *Coronet* and other magazines. Some of these were starred by Edward J. O'Brien in his annual best-story list. The week before the young man sailed from San Diego, word came from a large eastern publishing house that his first novel had been accepted. This youth had grown up in a Southwestern town and in country that he loved. His education had proceeded without unusual hardship or struggle. He had married, happily, and done some school teaching—happily, too, I believe. Time and hard work were expended before his first book had been accepted, but success in that sense, too, had come now. Should I have been surprised to find the following paragraph in his letter?

So far I have found this war a very lonely and heartbreaking thing, but I hope that something good may result from it in the way of future peace and prosperity for the common man, but that seems a rather forlorn hope due mostly to the atmosphere of strife, discontent, and self-seeking that is going on in the United States and all over the world. Of all the things that discourage us and make our sacrifices seem futile, the conditions as we hear they are at home do the most damage to our morale. I, of course, do not know how other soldiers in other wars have felt, but I do know that we in this war feel that we are fighting merely for survival and nothing more. And mere survival is not a thing that inspires human beings to very great heights of patriotic fury. We need a cause, a great and sincere cause, and we need it badly and I am afraid that it will not be forthcoming. That above all is the tragedy of those of us who are dying each day. If there were something for us to believe in with great enthusiasm, our tasks and our sacrifices would, I think, be much lighter.

This letter reached me on the same day the weekly copy of *Life Magazine* arrived. It was the issue of July 5, carrying pictures of the Detroit race riots. There, in graphic portrayal, was the "atmosphere of strife, discontent, and self-seeking" going on in the United States as well as all over the world. We are not surprised at this discontent in India or in Palestine. But the United States is a democracy, built on fundamental principles of equality of right and opportunity. Yet in Detroit that week there were thirty-one dead, six hundred injured, and 1,800 imprisoned for mob wars. For days, the factories

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producing war materials were shut down. Americans in North Africa and the Solomons were fighting the enemy. In Detroit they were fighting each other. Negroes and whites were not rioting in the desert or in the fox-holes, roving in gangs to bully each other, waylaying isolated individuals to beat them before shouting crowds. There was something on the battle fronts that led men to co-operate. Something there inspired confidence and a kind of faith. There was nothing to match that at home.

I have had other letters from men in the service. In them are jokes about the new types of experience and descriptions of new places visited. There are also earnest comments like that of the Naval ensign, comments upon the significance of the present conflict. Here is one of the latter sort, written by a graduate student in English, now a private in the Army Signal Battalion:

How is the war affecting the new freshmen? Is it stimulating any questioning on post-war issues—values, etc.? In England, I notice one significant thing: Among all classes—and in particular the lower middle and working classes, there is a great deal of interest in the United States—and imitation of the dances, mannerisms, and above all, language. What an astonishing inversion of the tendencies of the past 100 years! It is primarily the technological advance which draws the interest. The almost total participation of all classes in war work (wives of both nobility and professional men doing shifts in factory work) has precipitated the destiny of technologized leadership and the weakening of class barriers. One can note a genuine satisfaction and whole-hearted joy in the comradeship seen at Hyde Park where continuous singing (Welsh folk songs, traditional hymns, and American swing) is heard. The soap box orators are interesting as occasions of eliciting the rich spirit of cockney humor and earthiness. In that alone, I can sense the granite-like continuity from Elizabethan literature. The whole park is alive with the spirit of ribaldry and song, and quiet seriousness and piety of English hymn singing.

Psychologists have opinions on the transfer value of one intellectual discipline to another. This war must be providing them with some rather remarkable examples. An instructor in English informed his colleagues not long ago that he had become an aerial machine gunner. Writing from England, he said, "True, the landscape is most gracious and attractive and the people are cordial and amiable. True, the pubs are home-like (wrong word! I mean, cosy, with a pleasant hum of contentment), and the days move on quietly and calmly, but I am impatient with it all, for I know what we are here for, and I am ready to get into it. Perhaps you know that I have become a pretty fair aerial machine gunner: I plan to fly in our raids over Germany;

no easy thing, of course, but I am prepared to face the danger. We are close to the war here, and that is what I want—for how else can we win unless we pile right into the danger itself. I trust my machine guns and hope to teach the swarms of Focke-Wulfs some respect.” This young man, when he joined the army, was only two years out of graduate school and so far as I know had never shot a gun of any sort in all his life.

If he were to return to the campus of the university where he taught he would find the Army or the Navy incorporated into the teaching program. The Army has its Specialized Training Program, Premeteorological Training Program, Aircrew Pre-flight, Civil Affairs Specialists, Division of Area and Language Study. The Reserve Officers Training Corps dates from World War I. The Naval R. O. T. C., too, was established before the present war. Now the Navy has inaugurated the V-12 Training Program and the V-5 War Training Service (Civil Aeronautic) to supplement the N. R. O. T. C. What is the faculty reaction to the impact of this expanded military training program upon college education?

My answer is qualified by the restricted character of my observations and contacts. I have not conducted a survey of other universities nor even systematically conducted a survey of my own. I have, however, taught a group of Army men in the Premeteorological Training Program and a group of Navy men in the V-12 Program. In a more general capacity, I have helped to plan the English program for both groups in my college of the University. What I have to say, then, is limited to my personal observation and experience. However, from conversation with my colleagues, I believe it reflects other opinions than my own.

I prefer these men as students to the normal group which enters the universities in the fall, and I prefer the conditions under which they attend school to the normal conditions which prevail in peace time. Some selection among the men has been exercised by both the Army and the Navy before the groups are sent to the training institutions. Some emphasis has been laid upon the opportunities which are being offered in the schools. The men know that an avenue has opened for specific improvement and opportunity to advance in rank, and they look to the college instructors for exactly that sort of guidance. Some of the old primary motives, such as social life, fraternity membership, semi-professional athletics, and just time-filling between high

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school and going-to-work, are lacking. The rah-rah boys and Joe-college no longer park their sporty roadsters along sorority row and compare notes on the best items to date up for a round of the dine and dance clubs. Instead, these young men shut off their lights every week night at ten p. m. (unless they stay up for study) and turn in for eight hours of sleep. In the morning, they do not roll over for another hour, while the laboratory assistant checks an absence against them. On the contrary, they get up and run a half mile or so, leaping various obstacles, and then after breakfast, arrive at class with all their brain-cylinders working, instead of missing on three or four as in the old pre-war days. These boys do not live in the careless muss of fraternity or dormitory room. They make their own beds, without wrinkles, line up their shoes, even do some of their own laundry. After the war they may be a little difficult for a woman to live with, unless she served as a WAC or a WAVE, but at the moment, they are not "slouches" on the campus or in the classroom. This is refreshing to a teacher who by now has seen some twenty successive inductions of freshmen into college, each group very much like the group before it. These young men address their instructors as "sir"; they are trained in courtesy of a manly sort. They are never reproached for chewing gum in class or finishing off their meal in other semi-nutritious ways. They are rarely absent, and the drain upon teachers supplying make-up tests and interviews is not present. In the classroom there has been better attention and less diversion by girls entertaining boys and vice versa than in the old days. Out of the classroom the Navy boys are notably coeducational. The campus quip about "wolves in ship's clothing" is a libel on the genteel art of courtship as practiced under Naval regulations.

The contrast between military program students and the old is favorably illustrated by two stories. The other day one of the Navy V-12 boys went to sleep in a mathematics class. He woke up just as the hour ended. Discovering his oversight, he went to the instructor and apologized. There were tears in his eyes. "I had to stand watch all night, and then after only a couple of hours sleep I ate a big lunch at the dining hall, and just couldn't stay awake. I hope you'll excuse me and allow me to make up what I have missed." The mathematics instructor was overwhelmed, and gladly offered to help the lad in every way he could think of. Who wouldn't have been likewise affected? The normal student attitude is illustrated by the boy who fell asleep in class during pre-war days. After class the professor reproached him. "You went to sleep in class and missed my lecture,

didn't you?" "Yes, sir," the student replied; "I did fall asleep, but I didn't miss your lecture in the least."

Some of the boys in the Navy V-12 Program at the University of New Mexico have seen actual service in the Pacific. In a paper, one of the men wrote an account of what the sailors did "on leave" from the Fleet. It was an interesting paper, though I suppose he omitted some details that he may have thought were too lively for his instructor to read. In his conclusion, he described the entire college program, with its mathematics, history, mechanical drawing, English, etc., as "an extended leave." The V-12 men are loyal to the Fleet. A few of them have insisted on going back to it, in spite of the efforts of the officers to keep them in college so that they can be of greater service next year or the year after. They are loyal to college education, too. That is the point I wish to stress. It is not a chore or hardship, but it is an opportunity.

The military training program can also be made an opportunity for men and the colleges in the post-war period. As I interpret General Palmer, a democracy needs a civilian army as well as a professional army. We need a civilian navy, too. All of us need to have more of the feeling of belonging to these great organizations, as they also need to feel that they belong to us. That might be the clue to "the cause" the Naval ensign felt was lacking to us. In Detroit, in July, during the height of the rioting, three sailors rescued a negro and broke up a group that was attacking him. When a rioter snarled, "What's it to you?" one sailor told him, "Plenty! There was a colored guy in our outfit and he saved a couple of lives." A week before the Detroit riot an Army Sergeant, Lloyd Shearer, wrote an article called "What the Army Has Done for Us"; it is printed in *Liberty Magazine* for June 26, 1943. Sergeant Shearer said, "Spiritually, the war has enriched all of us soldiers with a fellowship and unity and unselfishness we never before knew in a highly competitive civilian life. . . ." He tells the story of Private Pete Chaney, who as a rookie, didn't get along well with the men who had enjoyed fewer privileges than he in private life. He couldn't see sharing his cigarettes or newspapers or cookies from home with the illiterate Tennessee hillbilly in the next barrack, or carrying on a conversation with the fellow whose reading level never rose above "Superman." After a few months in the Army, Private Chaney didn't differentiate when he "bummed" a cigarette in the field whether the man he asked came from an exclusive city suburb or from a slum. "The war is teaching Pete and all his ten million buddies that

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a bullet does not stop in mid-flight to read the name, color, and creed on a soldier's dog tag."

Walt Whitman said that among the virtues which formed "the hard pan" of Lincoln's character was a virtue unknown to other lands, namely "Unionism, in its truest and amplest sense." It is the virtue Whitman names as "comradeship," and in a preface intended for a Russian translation of *Leaves of Grass*, he calls it "such hearty comradeship" as was intended "for individuals to begin with and for all the nations of the earth as a result." I feel this quality among the Navy V-12 boys, and the Army group, too. It is good for the colleges and something new to them. From the colleges it might permeate the nation.

I know the pitfalls of compulsory military training. The ogre of Germany or Japan comes to mind: a military class, aggressive, imperialistic, leading the United States into dictatorship by an Army, Navy, and Air Force hierarchy. That, of course, would be the end of democratic culture, and the end of our true significance as a nation in world history. I do not propose even the first step in that direction. Nor does General Palmer, when he specifies a civilian commission to correlate any program proposed by the Armed Forces. My proposal is simply that the liberal arts and sciences in college education and the military program can each contribute worthwhile elements to the other; that something better integrated in academic and military aspects should take the place of the old R. O. T. C.; that something like the Navy V-12 academic program or the Army Specialized Training Program might serve as models for the post-war planning; that a cause, a very genuine cause, might emerge for the nation as we learn, both in college and out of it, individual and group discipline as the necessary companions to the ideals held by our democracy.