Soldiers

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The First Team

OPBAT Soldiers

NTC Turns 20

Army Transforming America

The Remarkable Mosaic of Military Education

TO a high-school graduate deciding whether to seek a college education or a military tour of duty, school or service seems to be an either/or choice. Yet, both currently and historically, the Army has helped soldiers pursue both options, often at the same time. In the summer of 2000, for instance, the Army established its University Access Online program to help soldiers earn college degrees or technical certifications through Internet-based courses. Soldiers may attend classes from anywhere in the world. America reaps direct benefits when these better-educated, technically proficient soldiers eventually return to their communities.

While this program is innovative, it is not altogether unique in the Army's history. Established in 1802, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., produced the nation's school-qualified military engineers. When these soldiers were not involved in military missions, America employed their talents for building infrastructure and exploring the vast, uncharted continent.

During the Civil War the Army established educational programs for former slaves, to reduce illiteracy and teach vocational skills. Many of these efforts evolved into the historically black colleges and universities still active today. As America moved west and the Army established forts throughout the frontier, soldiers often doubled as schoolteachers, instructing both military dependents and civilians from outlying areas.

The school-and-service relationship continued in several ways from the late 1800s to the present. Land-grant colleges offered students some military education that ultimately evolved into today's ROTC programs. Meanwhile, the Army sent many of its officers to the universities for advanced technical study. This practice kept many student-depleted schools open during World War II. The hugely successful GI Bill might have offered an empty promise to returning veterans if these colleges and universities had not been sustained during the war through soldier enrollment.

Today, the Army's worldwide college extension system has made it possible for soldiers who have entered service with virtually no formal education to achieve all levels of academic success during their military careers. From West Point to cyberspace, the Army's many educational initiatives have truly advanced what one historian calls the "remarkable mosaic of military contribution to civilian education." — *CPT Patrick Swan*