Overview History of the NROTC Unit

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History of the College of the Holy Cross Naval ROTC Unit

Introduction

In the 90-year history of the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) program, one of its most challenging periods came in the second half of the Vietnam War and its aftermath when several host colleges and universities terminated their NROTC programs to express opposition to the war. One bright spot for the Navy was the decision of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, after a lengthy review, to retain its NROTC program, the only one of the six unrestricted NROTC host institutions in New England to do so.¹

The Holy Cross NROTC Unit celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2016² and, to commemorate the event, this history of the Unit has been prepared by the Holy Cross O’Callahan Society. The O’Callahan Society grew out of the vision of Reverend John E. Brooks, S. J., President of the College of the Holy Cross 1970-94, and is named for Reverend Joseph T. O’Callahan, S. J. who served on the Holy Cross faculty before and after World War II. As a Navy Chaplain during the war, Father O’Callahan received the Medal of Honor for his actions on USS Franklin (CV-13) in 1945 and was the first Chaplain so honored since the Civil War. Father O’Callahan died in 1964 and is buried on the Holy Cross campus but his example lives on and has inspired thousands of Holy Cross NROTC Midshipmen who have gone on to serve as officers in the Navy and Marine Corps.³

The First Twenty-Five Years: 1941-66

The Dominant Years

In May 1941, with World War II raging in Europe and more than a year and a half old, the Department of the Navy announced that the College of the Holy Cross was to be among eight colleges and universities to be added to the existing 19 NROTC Units.⁴ Crucial roles in establishing an NROTC Unit at Holy Cross were played by David I. Walsh (Class of 1893, U. S. Senator from Massachusetts (1919-25, 1926-47), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs (1935-43, 1945-47), and former Massachusetts Governor (1914-16)) and Representative John W. McCormack from Boston, House Majority Leader 1940-47.⁵

The NROTC unit was established at the College of the Holy Cross on July 14, 1941 with the arrival of Captain C. Julian Wheeler as the Unit’s first commanding officer and, on September 27, the first class of 115 NROTC freshmen was enrolled.⁶ The NROTC midshipmen represented a quarter of the 402 students in the freshman class and another 101 freshman had applied for the program but not been accepted.⁷ By coincidence, the NROTC offices for Captain Wheeler were placed in the basement of Wheeler Hall and a rifle range was constructed in the basement of Carlin Hall with the armory underneath the chapel.⁸

The reaction of the Holy Cross student body to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and to the American declarations of war on the Axis powers was overwhelming. So many brave young men volunteered to serve in the U. S. Armed Forces that the College closed some residence halls and had serious concerns about its future.⁹ Some slight relief was obtained from the Navy V-7
Program (which allowed recent college graduates to continue academic studies as Naval Reservists) and from enlarging the NROTC Unit but, by mid-1942, this only amounted to 80 and 200+ students respectively. However, in 1943, the Navy provided essential support by including Holy Cross among the 131 colleges and universities (out of over 1600 applicants) designated to participate in the V-12 Navy College Training Program to educate Navy and Marine Corps officers for the duration of the war. Holy Cross’ presence among the 8% of colleges that successfully applied for a V-12 program was also very likely due to the influence of Senator Walsh and Representative McCormack. By the end of the war, the Holy Cross NROTC Unit and the accompanying Navy ‘V’ programs claimed most of the student body.

During the ensuing years of World War II, Holy Cross alumni and faculty served their country in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Of the almost four thousand members of the Crusader community who served in that conflict, one hundred and nine lost their lives. Their names are inscribed on two commemorative scrolls in Saint Joseph’s Chapel, alongside those honoring similar sacrifices in World War I, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

In February 1944, 48 members of the first class of NROTC graduates were commissioned as Ensigns and, although they saw a considerable amount of combat, they all survived the war. One hundred eighteen Ensigns and one Second Lieutenant were commissioned in 1945, 103 Ensigns and 8 Second Lieutenants in 1946, and 36 Ensigns and 10 Second Lieutenants in 1947. These classes completed the NROTC and V-12 students who had been enrolled during the course of the war.

On September 1, 1945, as the war ended, the Holy Cross Navy Unit had 363 trainees on campus. In February 1946, the unit began to de-mobilize and transferred some students to the V-6 (Volunteer Reserve) program at Great Lakes, some to other NROTC Units, and some to separation. On March 1, the Unit received 102 students for the V-5 (Naval Aviation Cadet) program but, on June 27, 157 students were transferred for separation or to Naval Air Stations to await flight training. On July 1, 1946, the wartime Navy Unit was de-activated, leaving just the NROTC Unit.

Because of the accelerated programs during the war, no trainees were left to commission in 1948 and only four Second Lieutenants were commissioned in 1949. By 1950, the College and the Naval ROTC Unit were settling into a peacetime posture, dominated by the Cold War, but this was short-lived and ended when North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. The 1950 class of 25 Ensigns and 3 Second Lieutenants increased to 36 Ensigns and 9 Second Lieutenants in 1951, and 67 Ensigns and 6 Second Lieutenants in 1952 in order to meet wartime personnel requirements.

In April 1951, the Holy Cross Naval ROTC Unit was joined by an Air Force ROTC (AFROTC) Unit as Holy Cross became one of 62 schools that year to establish an AFROTC Unit. By October, 271 freshmen had enrolled in the Air Force Unit which, together with the 322 students in the Navy ROTC Unit, represented almost one-third of the Holy Cross student body of approximately 1800 students.
During the 17-year period from 1950 to 1966, commissioning class size varied from 28 in 1950 to 78 in 1960 with an overall total of 914 (752 Ensigns and 162 Second Lieutenants) for an average of almost 54 officers per year. In addition, the Platoon Leaders Class (PLC) commissioned at least another 114 Marine officers in this period. In 1966, the Holy Cross NROTC Unit was the 15th largest of the 52 NROTC units in the nation, commissioned the third highest number of officers, and commissioned the highest number of Marine officers. Its Air Force counterpart was equally successful and, in 1962, boasted the fourth largest cadet enrollment of the more than 140 Air Force ROTC Units across the nation.

The 1,242 officers commissioned in the first 25 years of the Holy Cross NROTC Unit represented 52% of the total graduates from the program and incurred two-thirds of the known active duty deaths for Holy Cross NROTC graduates.

The Second Twenty-Five Years: 1967-1991

The Struggle to Exist

The Holy Cross Naval ROTC Unit began its second twenty-five years in a very strong position as one of the largest NROTC Units in the nation, despite the relatively small size of the school. However, public support for the war in Vietnam which had been strong when the military responded to the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 and when the Marines landed at Da Nang in 1965, was beginning to wane as American casualties mounted and as military manpower requirements forced greater reliance on the military draft. Ultimately, 18 former Holy Cross students (six of whom graduated from the NROTC Unit) would die in Vietnam, ten of them in 1967 and 1968.

1968 was one of the most turbulent years in American history. In January, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive which significantly escalated the level of combat, increased American casualties, and convinced millions of Americans that the war was not worth the cost. Nearly simultaneously, North Korea captured the intelligence vessel, USS Pueblo, beginning a nearly year-long captivity for the crew. At the end of March, President Johnson announced he would not run for re-election and in May, talks began in Paris with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong representatives to negotiate an end to the Vietnam War. In April, Martin Luther King was assassinated and Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination followed in June.

Other powerful forces had been building during the 1960s and included the push for full civil rights for black Americans and other minorities and a growing interest in equal rights for women. The King assassination triggered riots and demonstrations across the country and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August was also plagued by riots. To many, it seemed as if American society was coming apart.

In this atmosphere, Richard Nixon became President and initially reduced tension by pursuing ‘Vietnamization’ of the war which reduced American manpower requirements (and casualties) and by shifting the draft to a lottery system in December 1969 which effectively insulated nearly one-half of the draft-eligible population from being drafted. However, the President’s approval of a military incursion into Cambodia that began on April 30, 1970 led to mass demonstrations
that resulted in the shooting of four students at Kent State University\textsuperscript{31} and in more than 400 colleges and universities across the nation shutting down, including Holy Cross.\textsuperscript{32}

Starting at least by 1967, there had been ongoing discussions at Holy Cross over whether ROTC had a place on campus and occasionally these discussions had escalated to student referendums on the issue and to demonstrations when military recruiters visited the campus.\textsuperscript{33} Other colleges began to terminate their ROTC programs and, in February 1970, an Ad Hoc Committee on ROTC was formed by the Holy Cross Faculty-Student Assembly.\textsuperscript{34} Although these actions were not to be ignored, there was not a feeling that ROTC at Holy Cross was seriously threatened until the Cambodian incursion and subsequent protests. During the protests, Holy Cross ROTC midshipmen and cadets successfully adopted a policy of non-confrontation in order to avoid any violent incidents that might crystalize opposition to ROTC.

One result of these protests, however, was the acceleration of a comprehensive review of the Holy Cross Naval and Air Force ROTC programs which began with a student referendum in September. Believing that the Holy Cross student body (whose parents had helped win World War II) generally held centrist views on the American military, the Holy Cross ROTC midshipmen and cadets concentrated on a “get out the vote” campaign which produced the largest student turnout in recent times – 55%. Among the voters, 55% supported retaining ROTC with some changes, 38% supported phasing out ROTC, and 7% (a mixture of pro- and anti-ROTC) supported neither position.\textsuperscript{35}

On October 12, 1970, the Faculty-Student Assembly convened under the chairmanship of Father Brooks (a World War II Army veteran and the new President of the College) to decide the fate of ROTC on campus. After a lengthy debate, 58% of the Jesuit and lay faculty voted to retain ROTC but to thoroughly review the courses and activities.\textsuperscript{36} The Jesuit Community, who had founded and led the College since its inception, felt a deep gratitude to the Navy for the support it had provided during World War II and the decision to retain ROTC was partly due to that.\textsuperscript{37}

After a five month curriculum review, Holy Cross, alone among New England colleges, retained its NROTC program (and its Air Force counterpart) along with full credit for most courses.\textsuperscript{38} However, having survived the most serious threat to its existence, NROTC enrollment suffered and a real possibility began to develop that the Navy would drop the Unit. In the four years from 1967-70, the strength of the Unit was shown in the 177 officers who were commissioned in the Navy and Marine Corps, an average of about 44 per year. However, in the ten years from 1971-80, the total of commissioned officers dropped to 200, an average of only 20 per year.\textsuperscript{39}

In part, this drop was due to the reduction in size of the Navy and Marine Corps after the Vietnam War but, on March 4, 1975, the Holy Cross NROTC Unit was placed on probation by the Navy, a status that lasted for three years.\textsuperscript{40} By this time, the Navy was placing increased emphasis on graduating more NROTC officers with a technical education and, by 1978, was stipulating that 80% of line officer graduates have majors in mathematics, chemistry, physics, or engineering.\textsuperscript{41} In April 1977, the Navy included Holy Cross in a review of fifteen NROTC Units for possible dis-establishment because of low enrollment and the lack of an engineering school.\textsuperscript{42}
Meanwhile, other forces were at work that would affect enrollment in the Unit. For many years, Holy Cross had been studying a shift from a century and a quarter as an all-male school to becoming a co-educational school and this change was made in the Fall of 1972. For the first time, women would not only be Holy Cross students but could enroll in the NROTC program.

A second change was opening NROTC enrollment to students at other schools in the Worcester area. The Worcester Consortium for Higher Education, Inc. was formally organized in 1969 with the President of the College of the Holy Cross as the first chairperson. In late 1970, even as the Naval and Air Force ROTC Units were engaged with various College departments and committees over the allocation of credit to their courses, the NROTC Commanding Officer requested permission to enroll students from the Worcester Consortium in the Holy Cross NROTC Unit. This began a torturous twelve-year process to open the Unit to College Program (formerly Contract) and scholarship students that culminated in April 1982 with a modification to the contract between Holy Cross and the Navy that permitted transfer of funds for scholarship students cross-enrolled from other schools.

The Class of 1976 was a landmark class in the history of the Holy Cross NROTC (even though at ten officers it was the smallest class in 27 years) because it contained both the first woman commissioned through the Unit (who was also the nation’s first woman Marine Option scholarship student) and the first officer commissioned from a Worcester Consortium school (Assumption College).

In March 1978, the Holy Cross NROTC Unit was removed from probation and by January 1979, it had enrolled students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), Clark University, Assumption College, and Worcester State. As the military buildup of President Regan’s administration took hold in the early 1980s, Holy Cross NROTC officer output increased so that in the eight years from 1984-91, the Unit commissioned 295 officers, an average of 37 officers per year. In 1986, the Unit commissioned the fifth largest class of the nation’s 64 NROTC programs and the officer total in 1987 was even higher.

The Holy Cross Air Force ROTC Unit was under similar pressure in this time period and began cross-enrolling students from other schools in the Worcester Consortium in 1973. However, it, too, was placed on probation on March 10, 1976 for low enrollment, removed on April 18, 1977, again placed on probation in 1978, and removed on May 10, 1979. By 1982, the Air Force ROTC goal was to award 90-95% of scholarships to engineering students and this goal was primarily met by WPI students. Ultimately, it was this pressure to commission technically educated officers that led the Air Force to re-locate the Worcester AFROTC Unit from Holy Cross to WPI in the Spring of 1990.

In 1991, Holy Cross NROTC and AFROTC graduates contributed to the overwhelming American military performance in Operation Desert Storm, the end of the Warsaw Pact, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and victory in the Cold War.
The Third Twenty-Five Years: 1991-2016

New Challenges

The American triumphs in 1991 sparked a public desire to reduce military expenditures and claim a ‘Peace Dividend.’ As a result, during the 1990s, active duty military personnel declined by a third, Navy personnel dropped by 35%, and Marine Corps personnel dropped by 12%. These significant force reductions entailed a comparable reduction in officer requirements.

On March 22, 1991, the Chief of Naval Education and Training (CNET) Advisory Committee anticipated these reductions and announced a series of ROTC consolidations and eliminations. In 1993 and 1994, the House Appropriations Committee challenged the Military Services on the cost of educating ROTC students at private institutions. Finally, the Navy’s preference for technically-educated officers as opposed to those with liberal arts education which initially became a factor in the 1960s, continued through the third twenty-five year period.

The strength of the Holy Cross NROTC Unit, now including cross-enrollments from schools in the Worcester Consortium, continued although the number of schools with students in the Unit declined. Clark University was dropped from the program in the 1991 consolidation and the last student from Assumption College was commissioned in 1994, leaving only Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) and Worcester State University (WSU) as Consortium members of the Unit. While the Unit had commissioned 295 officers in the eight years 1984-91 (an average of 37 per year), the reduced military of the 1990s received just 165 officers in the ten years 1992-2001 (an average of a little over 16 per year).

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 galvanized public support for the military but President G. W. Bush chose to conduct Operations Enduring Freedom [Afghanistan] and Iraqi Freedom with minimal force structure growth so Holy Cross NROTC officer commissionings in the eight years 2002-09 were 174 (an average of 22 per year). Fifteen years of war have worn down the U. S. military and public support so, as President Obama has reduced the American military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, Congress is halfway through a ten-year budget reduction plan. As part of these force structure and budget reductions, Holy Cross NROTC commissionings for the seven years 2010-16 declined to 85 or an average of 12 per year.

The elimination of the military’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy for gay men and lesbian women in 2011 eliminated the last barrier to NROTC among some colleges that had abandoned it in the 1970s and Holy Cross is assisting Yale and Brown Universities in restoring NROTC. A Yale division of the Holy Cross NROTC Unit was set up in 2012 and Yale was re-established as an independent NROTC Unit in the summer of 2016. Brown students have been cross-enrolled in the Holy Cross NROTC Unit beginning in the Fall of 2016 and will participate in the same manner as WPI and WSU students. It should be noted that in the aftermath of widespread NROTC Unit closings in the 1970s, the Navy established replacement Units in New England at Massachusetts Institute of Technology by at least 1981 and at Boston University by 1983.

The decades-old tension between technical or liberal arts education for ROTC officers surfaced in 2009 when the Navy restricted 85% of its NROTC scholarships to students in 44 technical
majors. In 2014, the Navy also considered reducing the scholarship stipend for liberal arts majors but a joint letter from two retired Holy Cross NROTC graduates, Vice Admirals Costello and Daly, brought the matter to the attention of the senior civilian leadership of the Department of the Navy. The plan to reduce the scholarship stipend for liberal arts majors was subsequently shelved although the 85% set-aside for technical majors continues.

**Conclusion**

The 75 years of NROTC at Holy Cross coincided with America’s rise to pre-eminence in the modern world. After the horrific conflict of World War II, America spent 45 years in a bi-polar world and in a Cold War with the Soviet Union. The 1990s were a decade of relative peace after Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm but the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 launched a 15-year war that still continues. As America looks ahead to the next 25 years, the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, regional issues with North Korea and Iran, and the continuing war on terror all pose formidable challenges to the nation.

The more than 2,000 Holy Cross graduates and the more than 300 graduates of cross-enrolled schools who have been commissioned through the Holy Cross Naval ROTC Unit have made major contributions to the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the nation, whether they stayed on active duty, continued to serve in the Reserves, or assumed leadership positions in industry, the professions, government, or civic affairs. To illustrate this leadership, two of the Navy Memorial’s four “Lone Sailor” awards in 2015 went to Holy Cross NROTC graduates: J. William Middendorf ’45, Secretary of the Navy 1974-77, and Robert S. Morrison’63, former Chairman of PepsiCo and 1965 recipient of the Silver Star as a First Lieutenant in Vietnam.
End Notes

1. Harvard, Tufts, Yale, Brown, and Dartmouth all closed their NROTC Units. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) had a limited program for Engineering Duty Officers (EDOs) which was subsequently expanded in the 1970s to an unrestricted Unit.


Wikipedia, David I. Walsh
Wikipedia, John William McCormack


7. Karen Tsiantas, “Navy Unit Surfaces at Holy Cross During World War II,” May 6, 1987, p. 6. Ms. Tsiantas states 211 freshmen applied for NROTC and 110 were accepted. “Thy Honored Name” states 115 freshmen were accepted for NROTC. The author assumes 101 additional freshmen applied and were not accepted but the correct number could have been 96.

8. Kuzniewski, [Note 2], p. 298.


10. Kuzniewski, [Note 2], p. 299.


- Holy Cross College Archives: commencement and commissioning programs, newspaper articles, news releases, photos, and other papers pertaining to officer commissionings.
- CrossWorks: Holy Cross website with some college yearbooks, alumni magazines (1998-2017), and college catalogs. From the 1940s through 1970, the catalogs included the previous year’s graduates and commissioned officers.
- NROTC Unit Yearbooks (*Knight Watch*): some are available at the Unit.
- Phone conversations and e-mail exchanges with many of the individuals concerned.
- List of Graduates 1943-2004 by class year in the 2004 Holy Cross NROTC Annual Report. This list is based on a 1990 list but the underlying sources are undetermined and the two lists contain a number of errors.
- The spreadsheet has an additional column that identifies observed inconsistencies between the 1990 and 2004 Reports and other sources.
- The major causes of errors in all sources appear to be:
  - Delayed commissioning: if a commission was delayed for physical reasons, academics, or completion of a summer training cruise, the subject officer was handled inconsistently. Some were listed with their class, some were listed separately, and some were not listed at all.
  - Marine Corps Platoon Leaders Class (PLC) graduates. Although not officially part of the NROTC Unit, some graduates were listed with their NROTC counterparts, skewing the number of Marine commissions.
- The best estimate at this time is that, through 2016, the Holy Cross NROTC Unit has commissioned 2383 officers: 2008 Navy and 375 Marines. The PLC Program has commissioned at least 129 Marine officers.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.


22. Ibid.

23. O’Donnell, Commissionings [note 15].


   Brendan J. O’Donnell, HC Active Duty Deaths 1946- Present. Spreadsheet based on:
   - Memorial plaques in St. Joseph Chapel (WWII and later)
   - Memorial plaque in the NROTC Unit Wardroom (post-WWII)
   - “Vietnam and Holy Cross: A Timeline” by Jack O’Connell ’81
   - Memorials in O’Callahan Society Annual Dinner Programs
   - Online research for identified individuals

27. “Vietnam and Holy Cross: A Timeline” by Jack O’Connell ’81
   O’Donnell, Active Duty Deaths [note 26].


31. Summers, pp. 52-53.


33. Kuzniewski, [Note 2], pp. 415-421.

34. Kuzniewski, [Note 2], p. 424.

36. Ibid., p. 10.

37. Ibid., p. 10.


Letter from Edward Hidalgo, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Manpower, Reserve Affairs, & Logistics to Very Reverend John E. Brooks, S. J., President, College of the Holy Cross dated 7 March 1978. [Note: Mr. Hidalgo graduated from Holy Cross in 1933 and subsequently served as Secretary of the Navy, 24 October 1979 – 20 January 1981]. Both letters in NROTC papers in the Holy Cross Archives in Dinand Library. Four boxes of folders and papers covering admissions processes, President’s Reviews, and other topics.

41. Letter from George W. Hazzard, President, Worcester Polytechnic Institute to Reverend John E. Brooks, President, College of the Holy Cross dated 23 January 1978 citing the Navy’s new requirement that 80% of ROTC graduates who become line officers must major in mathematics, chemistry, physics, or engineering. Letter in NROTC papers in the Holy Cross Archives in Dinand Library.


43. Kuzniewski, [Note 2], pp. 440-442.

44. Kuzniewski, [Note 2], p. 428.

45. Letter from Rev. Joseph R. Fahey, S. J., Acting Dean, College of the Holy Cross to Captain Harry R. Moore, USN, Commanding Officer NROTC Unit dated 15 January 1971 referencing Captain Moore’s request to add Consortium students to the Holy Cross NROTC program and the discussion of this request at the 7 January meeting of the
Committee on Educational Policy. Letter in NROTC papers in the Holy Cross Archives in Dinand Library.

46. Modification P00001 (dated 27 April 1982) to Educational Service Agreement (ESA) N00612-81-G-0036 executed between Trustees of the College of the Holy Cross and the Regional Contracting Department, Naval Supply Center, Charleston South Carolina on 30 September 1981 added Paragraph 10 on Cross-Enrollments: “If otherwise qualified, a student at an institution that does not have a unit of the NROTC is eligible to be a member of a unit at a nearby college provided such cross-enrollment is approved by both institutions. However, in the case of scholarship students, payment of tuition, fees, books, etc., will be paid by the Navy to the NROTC host institution. Local arrangements must be made by the professor of naval science for transfer of funds from the host school to the school at which the student is enrolled.”


48. Letter from Edward Hidalgo [note 40].

49. Letter from Captain J. R. Wheeler, Commanding Officer and Professor of Naval Science, College of the Holy Cross to Commanding Officer, Naval Recruiting Command dated 8 January 1979. Letter in NROTC papers in the Holy Cross Archives in Dinand Library.

50. O’Donnell, Commissionings [note 15].


52. “History of AFROTC Detachment 340” [note 25].


61. O’Donnell, Commissionings [note 15].


63. O’Donnell, Commissionings [note 15].


66. Ibid., p.3.

67. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) had a limited program for Engineering Duty Officers (EDOs) which was expanded in the 1970s to an unrestricted Unit. Boston University Naval ROTC website http://www.bu.edu/rotc/navy/about/
68. NSTC Instruction 1533.3A [note 59].

69. Letter from VADM Barry M. Costello, USN (Ret) and VADM Peter H. Daly, USN (Ret) to Honorable Juan M. Garcia III, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (ASN) M&RA dated May 5, 2014.

70. O’Donnell, Commissionings [note 15].