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80th Anniversary of the College of the Holy Cross Naval ROTC Unit

In 2021, the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) Unit of the College of the Holy Cross celebrates its 80th anniversary.

In May 1941, with World War II raging in Europe, 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.

On July 14, 1941, the NROTC unit was formally established at the College 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, representing more than a quarter of the 402 students in the freshman class. After the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, America was at war and, in 1943, the Navy added the V-12 College Training Program to the NROTC Unit to educate Navy and Marine Corps officers for the duration of the war. The first class of 48 Navy Ensigns was commissioned in February 1944 and, by the end of the war, the Holy Cross NROTC Unit and Navy 'V' programs claimed most of the student body. Worcester Polytechnic Institute also had a World War II Navy V-12 Unit that was decommissioned after the War.

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the Unit prospered and, in 1966, Holy Cross had the 15th largest of the nation's 52 NROTC Units, despite the College's small size. The Vietnam War sapped much of the country's military support and, of the six New England colleges hosting NROTC Units at the start of the War, only Holy Cross remained at the end of the War.

One of the reasons for the survival of the Unit was the gratitude of the Jesuits to the Navy for helping Holy Cross survive World War II. As Rev. A. J. Kuzniewski, S. J. described in *Thy Honored Name*, the history of the college, so many young men entered military service that the college closed some residence halls and feared for its survival but the NROTC Unit and V-12 Program kept the college open. Another reason for NROTC survival was Rev. John E. Brooks, S. J., the president of the College 1970-1994. He had been a US Army soldier in World War II and had strong opinions about how America's military officers should be educated and trained.

Two significant NROTC changes occurred in 1976: the Unit commissioned its first woman (a Marine Second Lieutenant) and its first graduate from a college other than Holy Cross (Assumption). Since then, the Unit has commissioned 113 women as Navy and Marine officers and seven other colleges have participated: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester State University, Brown University, Clark University, Assumption College, Yale University, and Central New England College.

In total, the Unit has commissioned 2,458 officers: 2,070 Navy and 388 Marine, 2,089 from Holy Cross and 369 from other colleges. In addition, the College has commissioned at least 130 Marine officers through the Platoon Leaders Class (PLC) program.

Of these NROTC graduates, 17 made the ultimate sacrifice through their deaths on active duty, eight in combat. Additionally, two PLC graduates died in combat in Vietnam.

The O'Callahan Society wishes the Holy Cross NROTC Unit a Happy 80th birthday.