

A Brief History of West Virginia State University Army Reserve Officer Training Corps

West Virginia State University (WVSU) has provided military training on campus almost the entirety of its existence. Prior to the establishment of Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in 1942, Soldiers trained at WVSU served in the Spanish American War and in World War I. Since ROTC's inception, WVSU ROTC "Yellow Jacket Battalion" has produced an additional 871 commissioned Officers. This includes fifteen Officers who attained the rank of General, one Medal of Honor Recipient, two members of the famed Tuskegee Airmen, and men and women who have served in every war and conflict since World War II.

The Second Morrill Act provided for training in military tactics for all affected institutions. When the West Virginia Legislature established West Virginia Colored Institute in 1891, military training was not specifically included, but this training was in operation in the first year of the school's existence. The college was only a few years old when six students enlisted for service in the Spanish-American War. Four were so well trained that they were immediately made Noncommissioned Officers. In 1899 the West Virginia legislature passed the "Cadet Bill" that enabled up to sixty young men to receive free tuition, board, uniforms, and books. The program was discontinued in 1907.

In 1918 the U. S. Army assigned 120 soldiers from the national Student Army Training Corps to study military and academic subjects at the Institute. The program was canceled when the war ended. Forty-four West Virginia Collegiate Institute students and former students served during World War I.

In 1940, the institution took part in the national Civilian Pilot Training Program to prepare men for military aviation. Both ground school courses and flying lessons were given at Wertz Field adjacent to the college. Another Army program known as the Army Specialized Training Program also existed during World War II.

Much of the credit for the establishment of the present ROTC program goes to Mr. Daniel P. Lincoln, a former Registrar, and Professor Emeritus Daniel L. Ferguson, for whom the ROTC building is named. Their success in conducting military training on a voluntary basis early in World War II laid the ground work for War Department recognition. ROTC was formally established at WVSU in 1942, and at that time was the only one in the country approved by the War Department for a historically black college. Since then, Cadets who earn at least a Bachelor's degree and meet all other requirements are commissioned as Army Officers. Over 150 of these are currently recognized for their accomplishments in the WVSU ROTC Hall of Fame in the Ferguson-Lincoln Building.

Sources:

1. "West Virginia State College Bulletin", Series 55, No. 5, West Virginia State College, August 1968, Institute, WV.
2. Departmental Records at West Virginia State University Army Reserve Officer Training Corps.