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The Students' Army Training Corps in Virginia

R. Matthew Luther

A thesis project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

May 2023

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Part I: Background	1
The U.S. Army Prior to World War I	1
Mobilizing and Training for War	3
The Realities of The Great War	6
Part II: The Students' Army Training Corps	8
Origins of the SATC	8
The Navy & The Marine Corps	11
Part III: Problems with the SATC	12
Supply Troubles	12
Military Training & Education	13
Race	16
Class	19
Part IV: SATC in Virginia	20
The University of Virginia	21
Virginia Military Institute	22
Virginia Polytechnic Institute	23
William & Mary	23
Virginia Union University	24
Hampton Institute	24
Part V: Conclusion	25
Part VI: Building a Digital Exhibit	27
Bibliography	29

Acknowledgements

This project was born out of curiosity while looking through World War I photographs on the National Archives database. That curiosity sparked a digital project that I hope will be useful to other researchers, historians, and those interested in learning more about the First World War.

I would like to thank my director Dr. David Dillard for his support and guidance while completing this thesis project. Our many conversations about military history, the United States Army, and officer training gave me insight into themes and areas of history that I had not previously considered for the project. I am grateful for everything I have learned from him both in the classroom and in our thesis meetings. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Andrew Witmer and Dr. Timothy J. Fitzgerald, for taking time out of their schedule to review my project. The constructive criticism and feedback they provided was tremendously helpful.

The 3D models in the project would not have been possible without Annette Guild, Abby Adam, and Sydney Ring. Their knowledge and skills were invaluable in bringing this portion of the project to fruition.

Special thanks to Mr. Woody Harrison for being generous enough to let me borrow a few pieces from his personal collection to scan for the website. His generosity allowed me to display unique pieces of history that many have not seen before.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents. Their constant support and encouragement has allowed me to pursue my passion for military history. I will be forever grateful for all they have done for me.

Abstract

The Students' Army Training Corps (SATC) is an overlooked part of the United States' military training system during World War I. In early 1918, the War Department realized that they would need more military officers due to the rapid expansion of the Army for the war, the high expected casualty rate of officers, and the planned spring 1919 offensive. To help fix this problem, the Committee on Education and Special Training, a subsidiary of the War Department, created the SATC. College campuses served as training locations and male students enrolled at the schools received military training in addition to their academic studies. Some of the colleges also provided training in technical skills and trades to men not enrolled at the institution.

Previous study and analysis of the SATC either provided a brief overview of the program or focused on how college leadership and administrations handled the SATC. What has not been examined is how the SATC fit into the War Department's training and mobilization plan, how the program operated at Virginia colleges and universities, and what it was like being a member of the SATC. This digital exhibit and paper explore these questions with the purpose of providing a way for scholars and members of the public to better understand the SATC. The digital exhibit examines the SATC in depth at six Virginia colleges: the University of Virginia, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Virginia Military Institute, William & Mary, Hampton University, and Virginia Union University. Each school provides a unique perspective of the program and highlights the various issues that occurred in the running of the SATC. Overall, the SATC was a key piece of the War Department's mobilization plan, but numerous problems caused the program to fall short of the War Department's goal.

Part I: Background

The Students' Army Training Corps (SATC) was an integral part of the United States' military training system during World War I. Realizing that they would need more officers due to the rapid expansion of the Army for the war, the extremely high expected casualty rate of officers, and the planned spring 1919 offensive, the Committee on Education and Special Training (CEST), a subsidiary of the War Department, created the SATC. College campuses would serve as training locations and male students enrolled at the schools would receive military training in addition to their academic studies. Some of the colleges would also provide training in technical skills and trades to men not enrolled at the institution. SATC units would be established at well over 500 colleges across the country, but racial prejudices and white supremacist attitudes would limit the number of historically black colleges and universities that had SATC units.

The U.S. Army Prior to World War I

After the United States entered the First World War on April 6, 1917, its armed forces were woefully unprepared to fight a modern conflict against major imperial powers. Though the National Defense Act of 1916 had authorized the expansion of both the Regular Army and National Guard, these expansions were slowly implemented and had not fully taken effect by April 1917. The active-duty Army totaled around 120,000 men with 80,000 in reserve. Adding the Marine Corps brought the count to around 207,000 men and calling up the 380,000 National Guardsmen put the total strength of the U.S. land forces at just over 600,000 men.¹ Compared to Germany, which fielded a 1.9-

¹ Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 54–55.

million-man army in 1914, with a total potential military strength of nearly 10 million, the U.S. Army did not have the strength to compete with the Central Powers. While the British did enter the conflict with a relatively small force of approximately 125,000 men, the British Expeditionary Force was comprised of professional, highly trained soldiers and officers; the U.S. Army could not boast the same.² The Regular Army was a peacetime army, with aging company officers who had a strong affinity for drinking and reminiscing about exploits in the Indian Wars or the Philippines. Senior officers had little to no experience commanding troops during a major war, since the last one the United States participated in was the Civil War five decades prior. What conflicts the U.S. Army had participated in between 1865 and 1899 were considered small wars, primarily fighting Native American tribes out West. In 1898 the United States did fight a European power, Spain, during the Spanish-American War but the conflict was short lived.

The aftermath of the Spanish-American War in 1898 had seen some military reforms, spearheaded by then Secretary of War Elihu Root, who attempted to push the U.S. military away from a frontier security force towards a European style army.³ Despite Root's efforts, these reforms were largely ineffective, as there was not an immediate need for a European style fighting force. From 1900 to 1917, the United States continued to participate in small wars - fighting Moro guerrillas in the Philippines, interventions in numerous Central and South American countries, and chasing the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa across the Mexican countryside after his attack on Columbus, New Mexico

² "World War I - Forces and Resources of the Combatant Nations in 1914 | Britannica," Britannica, accessed March 9, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/Forces-and-resources-of-the-combatant-nations-in-1914>; S.L.A. Marshall, *World War I*, First Mariner Edition (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 45, 53.

³ John Garry Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers: The Plattsburg Training Camp Movement, 1913-1920* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x1rsj.5>.

in 1916. Additionally, training in the years leading up to the First World War was inadequate, with no major technical training programs or instruction about combined arms operations, an essential component of First World War strategy and tactics.⁴ With America's entry into World War I, the War Department had two major problems to address: manpower and training.

Mobilizing and Training for War

When it came to enlisted soldiers, the manpower problem was fixed with relative ease. Motivated by a variety of factors, including a desire for excitement, patriotism, and being inspired by war stories from Civil War and Spanish-American War veterans, over 437,000 men eagerly enlisted in the Regular Army and the National Guard between April and August 1917.⁵ A draft was implemented after enlistment numbers declined, and the size of the U.S. military continued to expand throughout 1917 and 1918. What was not as easy to fix was training these new recruits and, more importantly, training officers to lead them.

In order to train these new recruits and draftees, the War Department established thirty-two cantonments across the country, each large enough to house and train a division, approximately 27,000 men.⁶ This solved the problem of training enlisted men, but officers required more specialized instruction. The Army and National Guard had just

⁴ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I*, 55. Combined arms operations refers to the coordination between various types of military forces. During the First World War, the forces typically involved in combined arms operations were infantry, artillery, tanks, and air power.

⁵ Richard S. Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 15.

⁶ Matt Luther, "Fort Jackson, South Carolina," *On Point: The Journal of Army History* 25, no. 4 (June 2020): 46. Cantonments were military training camps; some would continue after WWI as permanent military installations, such as Fort Jackson.

under 9,000 trained officers in 1917 and many of these officers had very little combat experience. With the size of the army increasing dramatically, the War Department utilized a variety of programs to source and train officers.

Prior to 1917, the United States had attempted to establish a reserve of trained officers through the Plattsburg camps. Started by General Leonard Wood in 1913, the idea behind the Plattsburg camps was to provide basic training for businessmen and students in high school and college. These camps were put on during the summer in Plattsburg, New York, and civilians who attended the camps were instructed in close order drill, basic marksmanship, marching, horsemanship, engineering, ordnance via artillery practice, and basic field skills such as setting up a camp and rifle maintenance. Despite General Wood acknowledging that the Plattsburg camps did not provide sufficient training for officers, over 8,000 graduates of the camps were commissioned in the army by 1917. However, Plattsburg graduates were required to go through additional training after the United States entered the war.⁷

As mobilization began, the War Department created Officer Training Camps (OTCs) to train new officers. OTCs were established throughout the country, and only provided three-months of instruction before men were commissioned officers. These officers were known as “Ninety-Day Wonders” and constituted a majority of combat leaders at the battalion level or lower.⁸ Initially, not all graduates of OTCs were commissioned as officers, in an effort to have a reserve of trained men, but this would

⁷ Leonard Wood, *Plattsburg Training Camp, July 1916* (Poughkeepsie, N. Y.: Thompson Illustragraph Co., 1916), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100191550>; Richard S. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces*, C.A. Brannen Series 12 (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 28.

⁸ Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I*, 260.

change as the war progressed. In total, about seventy-four percent of all wartime officers came from OTCs.⁹ Graduates of the Plattsburg camps were required to go to OTCs before they could enter active-duty service during the war, a testament to the inadequacy of the training at Plattsburg.

In June 1918, the War Department replaced OTCs with Central Officers' Training Schools (COTS). Five COTS were established and focused on three areas of instruction: infantry, field artillery, and machine guns. The three infantry COTS were located at Camp Gordon, Georgia, Camp Lee, Virginia, and Camp Pike, Arkansas. The field artillery COTS was established at Camp Zachary Taylor, Kentucky, and the machine gun COTS was at Camp Hancock, Georgia. Rather than training for three months like the OTC groups, COTS training was four months long. However, given the late start of COTS and the Armistice in November 1918, a majority of the officers commissioned from COTS only had between two and three months of training.¹⁰

In addition to expanding the size of the Regular Army and National Guard, the National Defense Act of 1916 formally created the Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC). This program was designed to provide military training to male college students over a minimum period of two years, though many colleges and universities who adopted the program offered four-years of instruction. Upon graduation, members of the ROTC would be commissioned into the United States Infantry Reserve as second lieutenants and would hold their commissions as reserve officers for a minimum of five years.¹¹ While it

⁹ Faulkner, 31.

¹⁰ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces*, 82–86.

is possible that some members of the ROTC were deployed to Europe during World War I, the program's late introduction and scattered adoption hindered its overall contributions to the war effort.

Between the graduates of the Plattsburg camps, OTCs, COTS, and possibly some ROTC graduates, the War Department felt that in mid-1917 enough officers were being trained, even though the quality of that training was questionable. However, after more American units entered combat through the end of 1917 and into 1918, the War Department quickly realized they would need to expand their efforts to train officers for one important reason: casualty rates.

The Realities of The Great War

In August 1915, Major Spencer Crosby, the American military attaché in Paris, sent a report to Washington, D.C. that detailed French casualties during two months of fighting near the French town of Arras. He reported that the French lost between 60,000 and 85,000 men, but also acknowledged that the number of casualties could be as high as 200,000, double the size of the entire American Army and Reserves in 1914. Maj. Crosby's report did not seem to influence War Department decisions in 1915, but by 1917, his report was more important than ever as American troops and officers prepared for combat.¹²

Though only a few American units fought in Europe in 1917, the casualty rates were shocking to the War Department. Utilizing data from the other Entente Powers and

¹¹ Harry Downing Temple, *The Bugle's Echo: A Chronology of Cadet Life at the Military College at Blacksburg, Virginia, The Virginia Polytechnic Institute*, vol. III (1912-1920) (Blacksburg, VA: The Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets, Inc., 1998), 1970.

¹² Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces*, 23.

their own limited combat experience, the American Expeditionary Force General Headquarters estimated that they would lose approximately seventy-five percent of their junior officers every year.¹³ The lack of experience in trench warfare and the inadequate training that American officers received contributed heavily to casualty rates of both enlisted men and officers. The American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was losing so many officers in 1917 that as a stop-gap measure, a school was established in France in October to train enlisted men as replacement officers.¹⁴ The problem of high officer casualty rates would continue throughout 1917 and increase in 1918 as the German spring offensive (known as the Kaiserschlacht) forced more American units into action.

Compounding the problem of the expected seventy-five percent casualty rate for officers was the planned Entente spring offensive in 1919. With Germany's success with elastic defense in depth and their new offensive doctrine, the Entente Powers were expecting the war to last until 1919, especially since combat operations slowed down in the winter.¹⁵ The constant influx of fresh American troops into Europe meant that the AEF would have around eighty divisions for a decisive campaign against the Germans in the spring of 1919.¹⁶ More American troops in Europe meant more officers, which in turn

¹³ Faulkner, 176. A statistical analysis of the war written in 1919 reports that 80 out of every 1000 American infantry and machine gun officers were killed in combat. For further information see Leonard Porter Ayres, *The War with Germany: A Statistical Summary* (Washington, D.C., 1919), 121, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc276266/>.

¹⁴ Faulkner, 175.

¹⁵ George C. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Service in the World War, 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 175; C&Rsenal, "Small Arms of WWI Primer 065: The Pedersen Device," uploaded December 5, 2017, YouTube video, 1:14:49, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M637KpEP1_E, 38:30-38:55. For more information on Germany's elastic defense in depth and their offensive doctrinal changes, see Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War*, Leavenworth Papers 4 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981).

meant more officer casualties. Additionally, there was a fear that once the German army collapsed, they would resort to guerilla warfare which would prolong the fighting.

Colonel George C. Marshall wrote in his memoirs of World War I that if the German army turned to guerrilla warfare, “we would have had to occupy all of Germany, a difficult and lengthy task.”¹⁷ Fighting a guerrilla war and occupying Germany would significantly increase the number of American officers needed.

In order to combat this high officer casualty rate and future losses, the War Department looked for ways to increase the production of new officers. Despite increasing the commission rate of OTC graduates and expanding the size of each OTC class, they needed a better system for training both frontline officers and specialists, such as artillerymen and engineers. ROTC programs were multiyear and would not produce the necessary numbers fast enough. To solve this problem, the War Department replaced ROTC with a new program, the Students’ Army Training Corps (SATC).

Part II: The Students’ Army Training Corps

Origins of the SATC

The SATC was the result of combining several War Department efforts to increase troop production and training. In early 1918, the Committee on Education and Special Training (CEST) and its civilian Advisory Board was established by the War Department to investigate ways to acquire a satisfactory number of enlisted technicians

¹⁶ Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I*, 440, 458.

¹⁷ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Service in the World War, 1917-1918*, 203–4; Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I*, 479. George Marshall would go on to become U.S. Army Chief of Staff during World War II as well as Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense after the war. He also established the Marshall Plan which helped revitalize Europe after the destruction of World War II.

for the Army. After several meetings beginning in February 1918, the CEST decided to establish vocational programs, known as National Training Detachments (NTDs), on college campuses with an initial start date in early April and continuing throughout the summer of 1918.¹⁸ These programs lasted eight weeks and provided instruction for a variety of technical skills necessary for the Army to function including electricians, mechanics, carpenters, and telegram, telephone, and radio repairmen. Throughout the spring and summer of 1918, these NTDs increased in size and expanded to more colleges, though a majority were at white institutions.¹⁹

Developed concurrently with the National Training Detachments was the idea of finding a way to increase officer production for both frontline combat units and more specialized units. The Advisory Board first proposed the idea of using colleges to solve this problem in March 1918. In its proposal to the CEST, the Advisory Board suggested,

the establishment in all institutions of college grade of cadet reserve corps in which young men from 18 to 21 years of age might voluntarily enlist. It was further suggested that these students should receive military instruction, should maintain an academic standard higher than the pass mark, and should be enlisted, but on furlough status, hence liable to call to active service at any time.²⁰

This plan was designed to replace the multiyear ROTC program and was approved by the CEST. On May 8, 1918, a letter from the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, was sent to the president of every college and university in the nation outlining this new program.²¹

¹⁸ The Advisory Board, *Committee on Education and Special Training. A Review of Its Works during 1918* (Washington, 1919), 13–14, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000488027>.

¹⁹ The Advisory Board, 18–20.

²⁰ The Advisory Board, 22.

²¹ Memo from the War Department to College Presidents dated May 8, 1918, Box SF047, Folder WWI Training Camps 1917, World War I Students' Army Training Corps (SATC) and Training Camps Records, 1917-1919, Office of the Superintendent, administrative subject files, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, VA.

This initial plan was given full approval by the Army General Staff on June 28, 1918, and was dubbed the Students' Army Training Corps.²²

This initial plan for the SATC continued until August 6th, when Congress expanded the draft age to as young as eighteen and as old as forty-five. This caused a serious problem for colleges since many of their students were now eligible to be called up via the draft, which would mean fewer students in the SATC. In order to keep the SATC on track, the CEST revised the plan for the program. Under this revised second plan, members of the SATC would receive pay, like regular soldiers, and would be considered full members of the military, preventing them from being drafted and sent to cantonments or COTS. Additionally, members of the SATC who were between the ages of eighteen and twenty would spend different amounts of time in the program, so that they would stay on track with when they would have been drafted. Twenty-year-old members would stay in the program for three months, nineteen-year-old members for six months, and eighteen-year-old members for nine months. This would mean that the twenty-year old members would finish their training in time to be sent to Europe for the planned 1919 spring offensive and the AEF would have a fresh batch of officers every three months as replacements. Additionally, these men could be sent to various specialty units, such as the Coastal Artillery, as the need arose. Finally, the CEST rolled the National Training Detachments into the new SATC and divided the program into two sections. The A Sections of the SATC would focus on the collegiate training of officers

²² The Advisory Board, *Committee on Education and Special Training. A Review of Its Works during 1918*, 22.

while the B Section would continue the vocational training started by the NTDs. With this new plan, the SATC inducted its first members on October 1, 1918.²³

The Navy & The Marine Corps

While a majority of SATC units were focused on providing officers and specialists for the Army, there were also units for the Navy and Marine Corps. The CEST and the War Department were more selective with which schools were allowed Navy and Marine units, since these branches of the military had different needs than the Army. For the Navy, men with mechanical engineering experience were desired, given the need to run and maintain various ships, though men wishing to be deck officers or pilots were also accepted.²⁴ For the Marine Corps, which prided itself on being better than the other branches, they desired only the most skilled men to serve as officers, pilots, and soldiers.²⁵ As such, most of the SATC Marine units were at military colleges, institutions with a corps of cadets program, or colleges who had previously adopted ROTC programs.²⁶

²³ The Advisory Board, 24–25.

²⁴ Special Bulletin on Program for Naval Studies, Box 3, Folder 5, Records of the Dean of the College, Theodorick Pryor Campbell, RG 11/1, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

²⁵ Edward G. Lengel, *Thunder and Flames: Americans in the Crucible of Combat, 1917-1918* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 19.

²⁶ Student Army Training Corps Descriptive Circular dated October 14, 1918, Box 3, Folder 8, Records of the Dean of the College, Theodorick Pryor Campbell, RG 11/1, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

Part III: Problems with the SATC

Supply Troubles

The Students' Army Training Corps was poised to serve as a vital component of the U.S. Military training system during World War I. The establishment of a program designed to feed fresh officers and specialists to various branches within the U.S. Military was a forward-thinking effort on the part of the War Department. Yet, for the importance and urgency of training officers and specialists, the War Department failed to adequately equip SATC units. SATC units were last to receive supplies and equipment, though it was understandable considering a majority were sent to the AEF in Europe.²⁷ Many units did not receive necessary supplies, such as rifles and winter uniforms, until after the Armistice, when there was no longer a need for more officers and specialists.²⁸

When units did receive supplies, they were often unnecessary or second rate. For example, on October 25, 1918, the SATC unit at William & Mary received forty-nine mattresses, thirty-four of which were not needed.²⁹ Additionally, the piecemeal nature of equipment and supply shipments led to additional training complications, particularly for rifles. The United States had two official service rifles during World War I: the Model 1903 and the Model 1917. The War Department and Ordnance Department prioritized most of these rifles for the AEF and pulled the Spanish-American War era Model 1898 out of storage and commandeered rifles being produced for Imperial Russia for training purposes. This meant that an SATC soldier could be issued one of four different rifles,

²⁷ Memo from the CEST to Commanding Officer, Students' Army Training Corps, William & Mary College dated September 10, 1918, National Archives RG 165 NM-84 Entry 412 Box 681.

²⁸ Memo from Zone Supply Officer to all Students' Army Training Camps in Baltimore Zone dated November 15, 1918, National Archives RG 165 NM-84 Entry 412 Box 681

²⁹ Memo from Lt. D. B. Van Dusen to District Inspecting Officer dated October 25, 1918, National Archives RG 165 NM-84 Entry 412 Box 681.

each with a slightly different manual of arms that required different instruction and training.³⁰

Military Training & Education

The CEST placed heavy emphasis on both academic instruction and military training for SATC soldiers. However, the CEST failed to provide a standardized method of instruction for either, though more thought was put into academic instruction than military training. In terms of military training, the CEST did not designate a standard training manual, perhaps relying on the knowledge of individual SATC unit commanders regardless of teaching experience. The CEST did officially endorse a manual written by Colonel James Alfred Moss, a graduate of West Point who served in the Spanish American War. Between the Spanish-American War and World War I, Moss wrote a series of training manuals that covered everything from tactics to completing army paperwork.³¹ While it is unclear if Moss' manual was universally adopted, the content of the manual was setting up SATC soldiers for failure. The manual reflected Moss' 19th century training and career, providing instruction for outdated tactics and concepts such as how to volley fire, a tactic used since the widespread adoption of gunpowder.³² Volley fire is when soldiers stand shoulder to shoulder in several rows and fire their weapons at the same time. This made sense for armies using smoothbore muskets that took a

³⁰ Luke Mercaldo, *Allied Rifle Contracts in America: Mosin-Nagant, Mauser, Enfield, Berthier, Remington, Savage, Winchester* (Greensboro, North Carolina: Wet Dog Publications, 2011), 29, 33. Manual of arms refers to the operation of a rifle, particularly loading and firing.

³¹ "COL. J.A. MOSS KILLED IN AUTO CRASH HERE," *The New York Times*, April 24, 1941.

³² Col. James A. Moss and Cpt. George R. Guild, *Military Students Text Book Volume I: For The Use Of R.O.T.C. And S.A.T.C. Units At Educational Institutions* (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1918), 57, [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b293492&view=1up&seq=10](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b293492&view=1up&seq=10).

considerable amount of time to reload, but for modern battlefields with magazine fed rifles, machine guns, and highly accurate artillery, volley fire was outdated. While Moss' manual did emphasize mobility and accurate rifle fire, the preferred fighting method of the AEF commander General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing, its lack of discussion on trench warfare and combined arms tactics put SATC soldiers behind their European counterparts.³³

For academic instruction, the CEST had more guidelines and structure. Five programs of study were created for SATC members to choose from, with different courses for each. The programs were Infantry, Field Artillery, and Coast Artillery (Group I), Air Service (Group II), Ordnance and Quartermaster Service (Group III), Engineer Corps, Signal Corps, and Chemical Warfare Service (Group IV), and Motor Transport and Truck Service (Group V). Each program was designed to prepare soldiers for different roles within the U.S. Army. For example, SATC students studying for the Quartermaster Corps would take Economics, Accounting, and Statistics, while students studying for the Ordnance Corps would take Physics.³⁴

The CEST did not standardize courses through textbooks, recognizing that each college had different resources. Instead, they created Special Bulletins and Special Descriptive Circulars that outlined what each course should be teaching to SATC members. These were intended to serve as guides for professors and were subject to

³³ Lengel, *Thunder and Flames: Americans in the Crucible of Combat, 1917-1918*, 14; Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War*, 54.

³⁴ Memo from the Committee on Education and Special Training to Colleges having units (Collegiate Sections) of the Student Army Training Corps dated September 18, 1918, 4-6, Box 3, Folder 8, Records of the Dean of the College, Theodorick Pryor Campbell, RG 11/1, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

change.³⁵ They also ordered that every SATC member, regardless of program and section (vocational or collegiate) was to take the War Issues course, designed to educate SATC members on the, “remote and immediate causes of the war and on the underlying conflict of points of view as expressed in the governments, philosophies, and literatures [sic] of the various states on both sides of the struggle.”³⁶ The idea behind this course would be replicated decades later through Frank Capra’s film series *Why We Fight*, which explored the background and causes of World War II. Capra’s films were shown to U.S. soldiers as part of their training.³⁷

Despite the CEST providing more structure for academic instruction, the results were unsatisfactory. Men being sent from SATC units to other duty stations were not up to the same academic standard as other soldiers. The Commandant of the Coast Artillery School at Fort Monroe, VA complained about the academic failures of SATC men transferred to the fort and the Chairman of the CEST, Brigadier General Robert I. Rees, sent a letter to the entire command structure of the CEST and the SATC about the reports of academic failures.³⁸

³⁵ Memo from The Committee on Education and Special Training to Heads of S.A.T.C. Institutions dated October 17, 1918, Box SF047, Folder SATC Correspondence 1918 October, World War I Students’ Army Training Corps (SATC) and Training Camps Records, 1917-1919, Office of the Superintendent, administrative subject files, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, VA.

³⁶ Letter from Major Grenville Clark, CEST Secretary to Institutions where Units of the Student Army Training Corps are located dated August 27, 1918, Box SF047, Folder SATC Correspondence 1918 May-Aug, World War I Students’ Army Training Corps (SATC) and Training Camps Records, 1917-1919, Office of the Superintendent, administrative subject files, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, VA.

³⁷ Peter C. Rollins, “Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* Film Series and Our American Dream,” *Journal of American Culture* 19, no. 4 (1996): 81–86, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1996.1904_81.x.

³⁸ Memo from Col. R.R. Welshimer to Chief of Coastal Artillery dated October 31, 1918, Box 3, Folder 8, Records of the Dean of the College, Theodorick Pryor Campbell, RG 11/1, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; Memo from Chairman of the CEST Brigadier

Race

Official documents and reports published after the war claimed that the SATC was open to “all young men irrespective of their academic status.”³⁹ Yet, these reports do not address the racial inequality present in the program and the United States Army. A descriptive pamphlet published in October 1918 about the SATC lists all the colleges and universities offering A Sections, B Sections, or both. As of October 14, 1918, there were a total of 527 schools with A Sections, seventeen of which were HBCUs.⁴⁰ There were a total of 131 schools with B Sections, eight of which were HBCUs.⁴¹ This meant that of the 658 schools with an SATC unit, 3.79 percent of the schools were HBCUs. Between 1854 and 1915, roughly eighty-eight HBCUs were founded, yet only twenty-five schools, or 28 percent of HBCUs, were approved by the War Department to have an SATC unit.⁴² This low percentage of HBCUs in the SATC is noteworthy, especially considering the manpower needs of the Army, the eagerness of African Americans who wished to serve, and the legacy of African American military service.

General Robert I. Rees to Commanding Officers, District Inspecting Officers, District Educational Directors, and Heads of S.A.T.C. Institutions dated November 5, 1918, Box 3, Folder 8, Records of the Dean of the College, Theodorick Pryor Campbell, RG 11/1, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

³⁹ The Advisory Board, *Committee on Education and Special Training. A Review of Its Works during 1918*, 25.

⁴⁰ HBCU stands for historically black colleges and universities.

⁴¹ Student Army Training Corps Descriptive Circular dated October 14, 1918, Box 3, Folder 8, Records of the Dean of the College, Theodorick Pryor Campbell, RG 11/1, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

⁴² Bobby L. Lovett, *America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Narrative History from the Nineteenth Century into the Twenty-First Century* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2011), 370–72.

By the time of the First World War, Americans “generally equated manliness with physical and moral courage and a sense of honor with personal reputation.”⁴³ These beliefs of manliness were closely tied with military service and many young men enlisted to serve their country and prove their worth as a man through combat.⁴⁴ This desire to embody manliness was so great that many young men did whatever they could to enlist. Those who had failed Army standards for things including height and weight or had serious medical conditions, like a heart murmur, called in whatever favors they could in order to join the military.⁴⁵

While these motivations serve in the military were applicable to all young American men, white and black, African Americans had additional motivating factors. Some, inspired by the writings of W.E.B. DuBois, believed that their military service in Europe would lead to “greater equality in the United States” for African Americans.⁴⁶ Others wished to show that they were just as manly as white Americans and disprove the “white stereotypes about black innate inferiority and cowardice.”⁴⁷ While a majority of African Americans who served during World War I did not see combat, those that did showed that they were just as brave and manly as their white comrades and carried on a legacy of exemplary African American military service.

Since the Civil War, African Americans had served with distinction and proved themselves in combat. The Buffalo Soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments and the

⁴³ Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I*, 20–21.

⁴⁴ Faulkner, 22–23.

⁴⁵ Faulkner, 24.

⁴⁶ Faulkner, 245.

⁴⁷ Faulkner, 245.

24th and 25th Infantry Regiments fought Native American tribes in the West after the Civil War, served in the Spanish-American War, fought in the Philippines, and were deployed to Mexico to help track down Pancho Villa. Despite their combat experience, these units were often relegated to garrison duty and border security in Mexico, Hawaii, and the Philippines.⁴⁸ During World War I, two African American combat divisions were formed, the 92nd and the 93rd and though they fought under French command, they were some of the most decorated American combat units of the war.⁴⁹ There were also a small number of African American officers in the United States Army, but almost all of them were junior officers.⁵⁰

Given the expected casualty rates of junior officers, the dramatic expansion of the army, the history of service of the Buffalo Soldiers, and the eagerness of African Americans to serve, it would seem logical that the War Department would have increased the number of collegiate SATC units at HBCUs. However, the Army was imbued with white supremacist attitudes and the War Department initially felt that African Americans “lacked the requisite attributes of manhood – mental sturdiness, self-control, objectivity – to become quality officers. Moreover, [the Army] paternalistically assumed that only white officers could effectively manage black troops.”⁵¹ Given these beliefs, the War

⁴⁸ Chad Louis Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 66.

⁴⁹ “The Buffalo Soldiers in WWI (U.S. National Park Service),” accessed March 2, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/the-buffalo-soldiers-in-wwi.htm>.

⁵⁰ Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era*, 67, 129.

⁵¹ Williams, 39. Members of Hampton Institute’s SATC unit experienced this white supremacist attitude directly when they were ordered by their commander in late September 1918 that attending church services every Sunday in full uniform was mandatory. This was most likely an attempt to instill the “attributes of manhood” through moral education.

Department believed that the single African American officer training camp in Fort Des Moines, Iowa and the few SATC A Sections at HBCUs were sufficient.⁵² However, in late October 1918, as American casualties in Europe increased, the War Department issued a call for African American civilians to volunteer for COTS and to report to designated SATC units for processing.⁵³ This is a clear indication that despite the influence of white supremacy and the paternalistic instincts of the War Department, the combination of rapid expansion and the casualty rates required the Army to train more officers, even African American officers.

Class

Official War Department communications about the SATC during and after the war made no mention of race but instead focused on class. A report on the activities of the CEST during the war that was published in 1919 claimed that,

In order to open the privileges of the S.A.T.C. to all young men irrespective of their academic status . . . Any man with a grammar school education might then be voluntarily inducted into the corps. If he had not had high school training he was thus given an opportunity to demonstrate his ability to undertake the officer training and was transferred to the collegiate section as soon as his fitness was demonstrated. Conversely, students who had been admitted to the collegiate section but who were found unable to carry the work there might be transferred to the vocational section if their abilities indicated that this was desirable.⁵⁴

Despite this claim there is little evidence to support that any mobility between the two sections ever took place, at least in Virginia SATC programs.

⁵² Williams, 39, 66.

⁵³ Richmond Times Dispatch article “For Colored Officers” dated October 26, 1918, National Archives RG 165 NM-84 Entry 412 Box 652. Virginia Union University’s SATC unit was chosen as a processing point for African American civilian applications.

⁵⁴ The Advisory Board, *Committee on Education and Special Training. A Review of Its Works during 1918*, 26.

While the vocational sections had members with grammar school education, high school education, and college education, the collegiate sections restricted membership to those pursuing a college education, usually between eighteen and twenty years old. Additionally, vocational sections did not discriminate against age. The vocational section at the University of Virginia had members as young as eighteen and as old as thirty-four.⁵⁵

Part IV: SATC in Virginia

Examining the SATC through Virginia colleges and universities serves two purposes. First, there have been very few works that examine the SATC and those that do only provide a general overview of the program and focus on colleges and universities in the Northeast and Midwest.⁵⁶ Very little attention has been given to the SATC in Southern schools.⁵⁷ Secondly, Virginia had a variety of colleges participate in the program. The digital exhibit examines the SATC at six Virginia colleges: William &

⁵⁵ Students' Army Training Corps (University of Virginia), Records, 1917-1918, Accession #38-627, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

⁵⁶ The most recent work that discusses the SATC is Alexander F. Barnes and Peter L. Belmonte's *United States Army Depot Brigades in World War I* (2022). Others recent works include Lynn Rainville's *Virginia and the Great War: Mobilization, Supply, and Combat, 1914-1919* (2018), Harry Downing Temple's *The Bugle's Echo: A Chronology of Cadet Life at the Military College at Blacksburg, Virginia, The Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Volume III* (1998), and Richard Faulkner's *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces* (2012). Barnes and Belmonte and Rainville provide an overview of the program, Temple gives an overview of the SATC unit at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and Faulkner discusses how the SATC influenced the makeup of Central Officer Training Schools. He notes that the average age of an officer in training decreased and the average education level increased, but instructors were overall displeased with the physical quality and maturity of SATC men.

⁵⁷ Michael J. Faughnan, "You're in the Army Now: The Students' Army Training Corps at Selected Virginia Universities in 1918" (Ph.D diss., The College of William and Mary), 37, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304445751/abstract/D4CBC5397CC94EE1PQ/1>. Faughnan does discuss the SATC at schools in Virginia. However, he focuses on a comparative analysis of how the administration and faculty at William & Mary and the University of Virginia dealt with the War Department, the CEST, and running the SATC unit at their respective institutions.

Mary, Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI), Virginia Military Institute (VMI), the University of Virginia (UVA), Virginia Union University (VUU), and Hampton University, then known as Hampton Institute. Four of these schools, William & Mary, VPI, VMI, and VUU only had A Sections. Hampton only had a B Section, and UVA had both an A and B Section. VMI and VPI are senior military colleges with a history of military training.⁵⁸ VUU is the only private school, a possible factor as to why the War Department approved a collegiate A Section, rather than a vocational B Section. Additionally, VUU and Hampton are both HBCUs and provided a different SATC experience than the non-HBCU schools. Together, these six colleges provided a variety of perspectives to add to the small historiography of the SATC and American military training during World War I.

The University of Virginia

The University of Virginia was unique when it came to the SATC, as it was the only college in Virginia to offer both A and B Sections. The B Section focused on producing drivers, chauffeurs, and tractor operators for the Army. SATC members in the vocational section were rated on mechanical ability, speed, resourcefulness, and personal qualities. They took classes relating to driving and mechanical repair and were given practical tests to measure their skills. After being trained, B Section SATC members were graded as either apprentices, journeymen, or experts as truck drivers, chauffeurs, or

⁵⁸ “10 U.S. Code § 2111a - Support for Senior Military Colleges,” Cornell Law School LII Legal Information Institute, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/2111a>. The six senior military colleges are designated by Title 10 Section 2111a of the United States Code. The other four senior military colleges are Texas A&M University, Norwich University, The Citadel, and The University of North Georgia.

tractor operators. In addition to a standard SATC unit, there was also a Navy unit at the school.

Virginia Military Institute

Virginia Military Institute has a long history with the United States military dating back to before the Civil War. Founded on November 11, 1839, VMI grew in size throughout the 19th century and was heavily involved with the Civil War. Thomas J. Jackson, better known as Confederate General “Stonewall” Jackson, was a member of the VMI faculty until the outbreak of the war. The VMI cadets were activated for military service fifteen times throughout the conflict and fought at the Battle of New Market. By the early 1900s, the school had expanded to 700 cadets and 1,400 VMI alumni served during World War I.⁵⁹ During the war, VMI hosted an A Section of the SATC, with a subsection for the United States Marine Corps, one of only twelve throughout the entire country. Given VMI’s reputation as a senior military college, housing a Marine unit makes sense.

VMI can be viewed as a model for how the SATC was intended to function as members of its SATC unit were consistently transferred to other posts and Central Officers’ Training Schools. However, VMI’s reputation would force it into a tough economic situation since the constant transfer of men out of its SATC unit nearly forced the school to shut down due to lack of tuition funds.

⁵⁹ “History of the Institute - About - Virginia Military Institute,” accessed March 5, 2023, <https://www.vmi.edu/about/history/>.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute

Like VMI, Virginia Polytechnic Institute was and still is a senior military college. As such, it had a corps of cadets program which instructed students in military training in addition to academic classes. VPI was also one of the first colleges to establish an ROTC program, receiving official approval from the War Department on December 16, 1916.⁶⁰ Given their extensive background in military training and instruction, VPI quickly adapted to the SATC and established an A Section. Like UVA, VPI also had a Navy branch of their A Section, most likely due to the engineering program at the school.

William & Mary

The second oldest college in the nation, William & Mary was failing in 1918. The college had been struggling for decades with declining enrollment numbers; in the fall of 1888, there were only forty-eight students enrolled. William & Mary ultimately converted from a private institution to a public institution in 1906 and eventually went co-ed in 1918. While these changes did help the college a small amount, the saving grace for William & Mary was the SATC A Section that was established on campus. For the 1918-1919 school year, there were twice as many SATC members as regular college students: twenty-four female students, twenty-six male students, and eighty-one SATC members.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Temple, *The Bugle's Echo: A Chronology of Cadet Life at the Military College at Blacksburg, Virginia, The Virginia Polytechnic Institute*, III (1912-1920):1966. Unlike ROTC members, the corps of cadets are not a part of the United States Military and are not commissioned as officers upon graduation, though they do wear military style uniforms and participate in military training and exercises.

⁶¹ Michael J. Faughnan, "You're in the Army Now: The Students' Army Training Corps at Selected Virginia Universities in 1918" (Ph.D diss., The College of William and Mary), 37, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304445751/abstract/D4CBC5397CC94EE1PQ/1>.

Virginia Union University

Founded as a college to train Baptist ministers in 1865, Virginia Union University was the only HBCU in Virginia to establish an A Section, despite there being other HBCUs in the state. VUU is also the only private college being examined in this project, which is perhaps a contributing factor as to why the War Department gave VUU a contract for an A Section. It is also worth mentioning that the SATC unit at VUU was small, with only two officers and sixty-six soldiers.⁶² It is unclear whether a white or black officer led the VUU SATC unit, but it was most likely a white officer given the white supremacist attitudes in the Army and War Department.

Hampton Institute

Hampton Institute was founded in 1868 and during the First World War, established a vocational B Section of the SATC on its campus. Why the War Department decided to not establish an A Section like they did at VUU is unknown, but perhaps the school's reputation as a trade school played into that decision. Photographs in the National Archives show the members of the National Training Detachment at Hampton engaging in physical exercise, military drill, carpentry, and vehicle repair and maintenance. The Hampton NTD was very successful, and men were consistently transferred to other units once they had completed their vocational training. Given that the National Training Detachments were converted to vocational B Sections of the SATC and the success of the Hampton NTD, it is likely that these activities and training courses were continued by the SATC unit at Hampton.

⁶² Telegram to District Military Inspector dated October 31, 1918, National Archives RG165 NM-84 Entry 412 Box 652, Memo titled "Complete roster commissioned officers" dated November 19, 1918, National Archives RG 165 NM-84 Entry 412 Box 652.

Part V: Conclusion

With the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, the CEST began the process of demobilizing the SATC. By December 21, 1918, all soldiers and officers of the SATC were either transferred or discharged.⁶³ In the immediate years after the war, the program was written about a few times. The CEST produced a report detailing its efforts during the war and J.H. Wigmore, Dean of Northwestern University's Law School, wrote a report about the effectiveness of the SATC. Both reports provide an overly optimistic assessment of the program. This is not surprising considering that the CEST and Wigmore, who was a lieutenant colonel during the war and served on the CEST, had a vested interest in making the program look as good as possible. For example, Wigmore reports that the SATC provided a large reserve of officer candidates, prevented colleges from financially suffering due to students leaving for military service, allowed young men to continue their education while training for war, provided discipline, and "furnished a unique experience of great value."⁶⁴

Despite this optimistic outlook, the SATC had plenty of negative results. First and foremost, the lack of support from the CEST and the War Department led to many logistical, administrative, and training problems for SATC units. Proper equipment and materials necessary for military training were not provided in a timely fashion. The emphasis on Army procedure and lack of administrative direction led to delays in men being inducted into the SATC. Additionally, the lack of standardization of military and

⁶³ The Advisory Board, *Committee on Education and Special Training. A Review of Its Works during 1918*, 33.

⁶⁴ J. H. Wigmore, "The Students' Army Training Corps," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors (1915-1955)* 8, no. 7 (1922): 61, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40217179>.

academic instruction resulted in soldiers being trained in outdated, antiquated methods of combat and lack luster academic performance. Had the war continued into 1919, it is highly possible that the quality of officers from SATC units would have been a detriment to the war effort.

Second, the CEST's lack of awareness for the financial impact of the SATC almost led VMI to disaster. Colleges were not required to equip and supply their SATC units, as the War Department provided all necessary equipment, uniforms, and other materials. However, the constant transfer of men from VMI resulted in lost tuition money which caused unnecessary financial strain on the institution. Rather than having a plan to cover the loss of tuition funds for VMI, the War Department continued transferring men and let one of their greatest assets in the SATC program slowly slip towards financial ruin.

Finally, while the CEST and the War Department claimed after the war that the SATC was open to all regardless of race or class, their actions during the war proved otherwise. The possibility of moving from a vocational B Section to a collegiate A Section was nearly impossible given the academic requirements. Additionally, the white supremacist attitudes of the War Department limited the number of HBCUs that had SATC units which in turn kept many African American men who might have made excellent officers from joining the collegiate A Sections.

Overall, the SATC program was a moderate success for the CEST and the War Department. When the program worked as intended, such as at VMI and Hampton, it provided an essential reserve of trained men for the war effort. However, the

mismanagement of the SATC by the CEST and the War Department hindered the program's effectiveness even at the most successful institutions in Virginia.

Part VI: Building a Digital Exhibit

Rather than a traditional thesis, I chose to create a public history project to explore the SATC. I settled on my topic after finding some photographs labeled "SATC" in the National Archives' American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs, 1917-1918.⁶⁵ Looking at these photos of the SATC from various colleges and universities made me want to learn more about the program. I decided that a digital exhibit was the best choice as it would allow me to create a more engaging and accessible way to help revive this neglected aspect of the United States' military training system in World War I.

The first major step was gathering information about the SATC. Given the short lifespan of the program, basic internet research yielded few results. College archives and the National Archives provided the best sources of information, though William & Mary kept very few records relating to the SATC in their special collections. A majority of the sources I found in the archives were government and military memos, telegrams, letters, and reports. First person accounts of the program were difficult to find, though I was fortunate in finding two firsthand accounts, one from William & Mary in the form of an SATC yearbook and one from the University of Virginia in the form of a few anecdotes from a former SATC member.

Building the website and formatting it was more challenging than expected. Getting the website to look professional and be accessible was the main goal and after

⁶⁵ The National Archive's American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs, 1917-1918: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/533461>.

several hours of tweaking settings and code, as well as working with feedback from my peers, I believe that I have achieved that objective. I treated each page like it was a museum display and tried to balance informative text with images and videos to keep viewers engaged. Many of the photos came from the National Archives' American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs, but others came from the primary sources I found in archives.

The largest challenge was deciding how to separate the information on the digital exhibit. I initially planned on using each of the six colleges to highlight a different aspect of the SATC, with each school focusing solely on a specific theme. This idea was based off my findings in the archives of each school as well as the National Archives. My initial plan was to use William & Mary to discuss supply issues, UVA for military training, Virginia Tech for education, Hampton for vocational training, VUU for race, and VMI for functionality. However, as I progressed in my research and development of the website, I realized that many issues were present at all the schools, even at VMI, the most functional of the selected schools. Rather than limit myself to one issue or theme per school, I decided to utilize all the documents I found to paint a more complete picture about the SATC and its daily operation in Virginia colleges. My original plan of one school per theme is still the foundation of each section, but they have been supplemented with evidence from other schools. The unique stories from each school are still present in the exhibit, but they are fleshed out and provide a more in-depth look at the SATC than previous works. My hope is that this exhibit and paper will be useful to future researchers and the public to better understand this forgotten aspect of World War I.

Project Link: <https://matthlutherthesis.com/>

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