

1945 May 21-27

Free College, with a Catch

The cost of going to college has always been expensive, and it can seem astronomical now. Grants and scholarships have long been an avenue to offset some of the costs.

During World War II, the armed forces offered scholarship programs designed to give young men the opportunity to go to college as long as they made a commitment to military service.

In the middle of 1943, the War Department announced the creation of the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program. Male volunteers between the ages of 17 and 18 took tests to qualify for the 25,000 available scholarships in the program. There would be no military training until the student turned 18. At the end of that school term, the student would be placed on active military duty for basic training. Then he would enter the [Army Specialized Training Program](#) (ASTP).¹



Shoulder patch of the ASTP

(99th Infantry Division Historical Society)

The [Army Specialized Training Program](#) (ASTP) was active from December 1942 to February 1944.² Admission tests were given for men from ages 17 to 21 who were high school graduates. The goal of the Army program was to fill its need for specialists and technicians. The Navy counterpart was the [V-12 program](#). The Navy College Program specified courses of study that could lead to an officer's commission in the Navy. The Army and the Navy paid the college expenses in both programs.³

Qualified enlisted men could also enter the program to get a four-year college education and one and one-half years of specialized technical training that would lead to an officer's commission. While they were in college, these men were still in the military, wearing uniforms, standing inspections, and marching. The Army largely disbanded the program in early 1944 because of the need for manpower in

Europe before and after the Normandy invasion in Europe.⁴ The scholar-officers-in-training went back to being foot soldiers.

Despite this, the Army was still recruiting young men for the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program in May 1945, as can be seen in the following articles.

Army Specialized Training Test

"By achieving a highly satisfactory score on your April 12 Army Specialized Training Reserve Program Qualification Test, you have demonstrated exceptional ability, and have won for yourself the right to a free military scholarship at one of the nation's leading colleges or universities." This message was received by four boys from Onalaska high school. The boys were two seniors, Keith Bucklin and Charles Tall and two juniors, Lawrence Pooler and Robert Schuttenhelm. We from Onalaska high are proud of these four boys who showed great ability in clear thinking and good leadership in answering the difficult questions. The test was given in the English room of the Onalaska high school by Mr. Tall. Ten junior and senior boys took part in the test with four winning.

—Robert Smith.

(La Crosse County Record, 1945 May 24, page 5)

Nine Qualify For Program Eligible Students Notified By Army

Nine students of La Crosse Central and Logan high schools achieved a satisfactory score in the April 12 qualifying test for the army specialized training program, and now are eligible for military scholarships, it was announced Saturday by Col. W. Lutz Krigbaum, commander of the Wisconsin-upper Michigan district of the Sixth Service command.

The successful students received personal letters of congratulation from ranking army officials.

The students were: From Central—Harry F. Bangsberg, 1230 Ferry street; Ronald F. Gillmeister, PO Box 131; Carl G. Prellwitz, 712 North 10th street; James C. Robinson, 1527 Badger street; Donald E. Schlifer, 732 North 23rd street; and Arthur J. Vlasak, 1322 Redfield street. From Logan—Philip Hamilton, R. 2, La Crosse; Jack Klar, 1441 Wood street; and Robert Ryan, 1008 Vine street.

Wrote Special Test

Along with thousands of other high school students throughout the country, they wrote a special test to determine their scholastic abilities and general aptitude for free college training under sponsorship of the army.

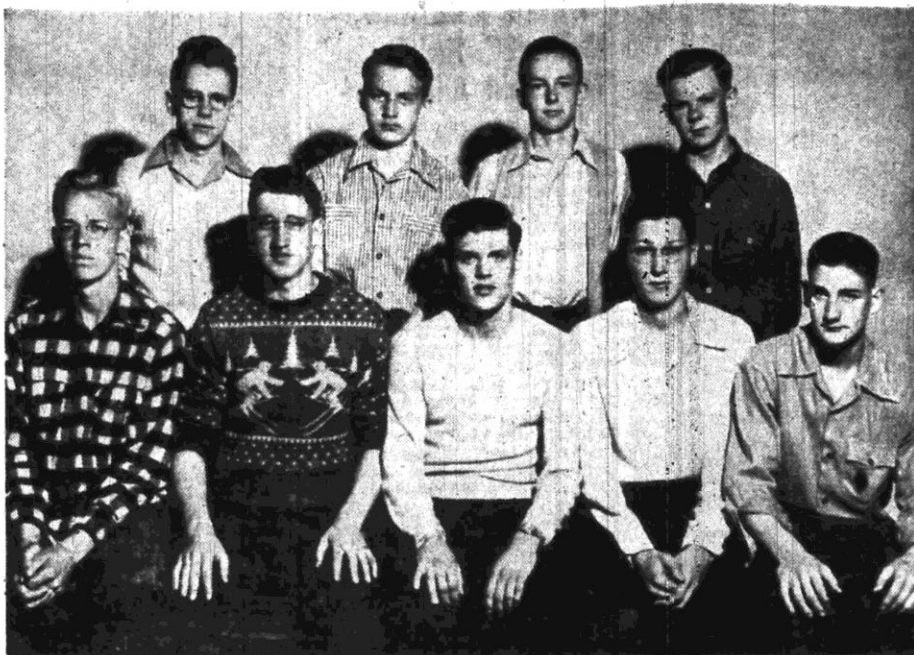
The military scholarship to which these successful students are entitled will include a minimum school of six months, with all expenses, such as tuition, text books, uniforms, food, lodging and transportation, being paid by the army. Youths who enroll in the program will be placed in the enlisted reserve corps, unassigned, and will not be called to active duty until they have passed their 18th birthday. ASTRP students who reach the age of 18 while still in college will be allowed to finish their term before leaving for active service.

Col. Krigbaum urged all qualified students to take immediate advantage of the exceptional opportunities which they have earned by successfully passing the qualifying tests.

May Complete Enlistment

The students now may complete their enlistment. The applications should be filed as soon as possible at the U. S. army recruiting station, 509 Union National bank building, Eau Claire, Wis.

Those students born in October, 1927, are eligible for the training program in July; born in November, 1927, eligible in July or August; born after November, 1927, and before July, 1928, eligible in July, August or September; born or September; and born in August, or September; and born in August, 1928, eligible in September.



—Tribune Photo

Qualifying For The Army College Program were these nine Central and Logan high school students. Left to right, they are: Front row—Donald E. Schlifer, Jack Klar, Ronald J. Gillmeister, James Robinson and Carl Prellwitz; back row—Philip Hamilton, Robert Ryan, Harry Bangsberg and Arthur J. Vlasak.

A similar program that is still in operation is the [Reserve Officer Training Corps](#) (ROTC). Presently more than 1,700 colleges and universities in the United States offer ROTC. In exchange for a scholarship, young people agree to serve in the military after graduation. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps all have ROTC programs.⁵ The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has had an Army ROTC program for decades. Today, the Eagle Battalion at UW-La Crosse also includes men and women from Winona State University and Viterbo University in its ranks.

Jeff Rand

Adult Services Librarian

La Crosse Public Library

jrand@lacrosselibrary.org

Sources & Notes:

¹ "Military Scholarships Offered Volunteers, 17," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1943 June 25, page 11.

² David M. Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 325. The two local newspaper articles included here show that the Army was still giving tests for an ASTP Reserve program in early 1945.

³ "Army-Navy Test For Special Training To Be Given Here," *The Hearne Democrat*, Hearne, Texas, 1944 February 25, page 1.

⁴ "Army Specialized Training Program," *99th Infantry Division Historical Society*, accessed 2020 May 29, <https://www.99thinfantrydivision.com/army-specialized-training-program/>.

⁵ "ROTC Programs," *Today's Military*, accessed 2020 May 31, <https://www.todaysmilitary.com/education-training/rotc-programs>.