

**The Reserve Officers
Training Corps
has revamped its**

ROTC's New Way

**curriculum and is
putting programs
online.**

By Peter Grier

PERHAPS you are a US high schooler, and you think that, in today's smaller military, the Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps is a route to a dead-end job. If so, Brig. Gen. Susan L. Pamerleau has a message for you: You're wrong.

General Pamerleau, commandant of AFROTC, says it is true that, in the early 1990s, the program went through some tough times. As the whole military shrank, so did ROTC programs. It got to a point where cadets were asked whether they wished to voluntarily "disenroll." Coveted flying slots allocated to AFROTC graduates virtually dried up, dropping to a low point of 100 in Fiscal 1994.

However, the overall Air Force has stabilized and so have its traditional sources of officer candidates. In fact, AFROTC's vital signs—enrollment and officer production—are getting stronger. Perhaps most important, the future for those who make it in and through ROTC programs and don a uniform may be as bright as at any time in the recent past.

Says General Pamerleau, "When these young lieutenants get to be senior captains and majors, . . . wow, I wish I were there."

That is because in the past few years the Air Force has brought in fewer entry-level people than actually called for in official requirements. Today's ROTC grads will face less competition than their older colleagues as they progress in their careers and thus will have greater opportunity to land key jobs.

They will also have had a more modern military education than some of their predecessors. ROTC officials are doing their best to see that graduates are ready for the highly computerized Air Force of the twenty-first century, producing a new curriculum and upgrading the system with new technologies.

Largest Source

"ROTC is extremely important in assuring that we bring quality officers into the Air Force," says General Pamerleau. "It is the oldest and largest source of officers for the service."

It may also be the easiest to take for granted. The Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., remains the more prestigious gateway to an Air Force job; however, it is ROTC that, over the years, day in and day out, has shaped most of the men and

women who form the backbone of the force. It has done so in a cost-effective manner. The latest available figures show that the price of producing an Air Force lieutenant via ROTC is about \$77,000.

AFROTC has deep historical roots. The first Air ROTC units were established in the early 1920s at the University of California, Berkeley, at Georgia Institute of Technology, and at four other technically oriented US institutions of higher learning. After World War II, the new Department of Defense increased the number of Air ROTC units to seventy-eight.

Today 146 Air Force ROTC detachments are scattered across the nation, providing tuition-and-books scholarships to cadets in return for a commitment to military education and, after graduation, entry into the long blue-suit line. Students can choose either a full four years of ROTC or, if they pass a screening process, just the final two years.

These important last years, which form the Professional Officer Course (POC), are the time when instructors focus on the Air Force as a cadet's prospective career.



USAF photo by Fernando Serna

This fiscal year, the Air Force expects to have about 13,800 enrolled in AFROTC programs. That number is about average, compared to the levels of the 1990s, but it is well short of the yearly average for the 1980s—23,300.

Enrollment bottomed out in 1992, at just over 10,000. That was the worst of the tough times, as it was in the Air Force as a whole. There were still too many cadets in the pipeline, when measured against available jobs, and ROTC officials were forced to tell some cadets that they would not be getting pilot or navigator slots, after all.

"There was a conscious decision to reduce accessions," says General Pamerleau.

Traditionally, AFROTC produces between fifty and sixty percent of all officers entering the Air Force. Measured in terms of graduating young lieutenants, the recent low ROTC year was 1994, when officials commissioned just over 1,400 cadets—little more than half the number of 1989. This year, the projected number is up to 1,700.

Air Force plans now call for ROTC to produce around 2,000 young of-

ficers a year by 2000. "We've got some stability through the end of the century," says General Pamerleau.

Pilot numbers are slowly recovering, as well. In the low years of 1993 and 1994, ROTC was allocated only 100 slots for entrance into flight school—fewer than one per detachment, on average. The goal for next spring is to send 300 ROTC cadets into undergraduate pilot training and 560 a year by the turn of the century.

"We'll soon be back to the same level of flying opportunity as we were before the drawdown," the General predicts.

ROTC officials call their current state one of "fragile success." They need to sustain their momentum and stability, they say, as do personnel officers in the force as a whole. And they need to get the word out to potential ROTC enrollees that the Air Force, in effect, is still hiring.

Recruiters do not have to be the only people carrying this message. The whole Air Force can contribute to ROTC's success, according to the program's commandant.

"Everybody knows . . . an outstanding young man or woman who would be the right kind of person to

offer a future in the Air Force," General Pamerleau says.

Freshman enrollment, a key indicator of future interest, has firmed up again. This fall, 6,000 students entered their first AFROTC classes, enough to promise that in two years the competition to win entry into the final two POC years will be as keen as it should be. That is to say, the competition will be stiff if efforts to retain cadets past their freshman year pay off. In the past, pre-sophomore dropouts have been a big ROTC problem, one that General Pamerleau is trying to solve.

An ASSIST for the Program

One tool in this regard is AS 100 Selective Incentive Shadow Training (ASSIST), an ROTC adjunct program intended to bring home to cadets what the Air Force is all about. A ten-day program held at ten Air Force bases around the country, ASSIST exposes new cadets to aircraft and life on base and tries to get them excited about military life.

ROTC detachment commanders recruit students for ASSIST, and so far, the retention rate for participating freshmen is ninety-five percent.

Overall, the ROTC freshman retention rate for 1995 has been five percent higher than it was in 1994.

ROTC officials hope to build on this success through a cooperative effort with the Air Force Academy that will bring promising freshmen to Colorado Springs [see "Airmanship Spoken Here," December 1995, p. 74]. Sending cadets aloft in gliders

with a recommended reading list for students. The weight of drawing up specific lesson plans—and of adding educational spice to interest students—fell squarely on the shoulders of detachment instructors. Many were up to the task. Some were not.

By the early 1990s, it was clear something had to be done. The drawdown was making manning issues critical throughout the service, and

cornerstone of their entire university academic program. ROTC courses normally count for academic credit, as would any other elective. Colleges and universities typically treat ROTC as a separate academic department. Instructors are active-duty Air Force officers with master's degrees, accorded the educational rank of assistant professors.

The first two years of the four-year ROTC program involve the General Military Course. GMC now consists of one hour of classroom work and two hours of leadership lab each week. It provides basic instruction about the armed forces in general, and the Air Force in particular, and serves as a prelude to the more intensive final two years of POC classes.

Once a cadet is approved for entry into POC, the academic work load gets heavier. Classes are smaller and last three hours per week, with topics ranging from management skills to US national security policy. Weekly leadership labs can take another two hours.

ROTC's first two years are "followership oriented," says Colonel Gable. The final years, by contrast, are designed to produce leaders. "The last two years are really preparation for active duty," he says.

An increase in leadership instruction lies at the heart of Curriculum 2000 changes. In the past, ROTC courses were heavy on military history. The new lesson plan, by contrast, has greatly reduced the amount of time devoted to this field. Military history is still taught—but largely as the history of military leadership. Instructors focus on great officers and how they reacted to their times.

Officers, Not Historians

"After all," says Colonel Gable, "we're not trying to produce historians. We're trying to produce second lieutenants."

ROTC officials say they also believe that their new curriculum is more dynamic than the one it replaced. On one level, that means it is more responsive to change. With a better idea of what everyone is teaching, and when, the Air Force can more easily insert updates as necessary. Top Air Force officials recently reduced the number of service "core values," for example, and ROTC quickly adjusted its teaching materials midsemester.

Fifty Years of Air Force ROTC

Total Enrollment

1947 8,487	1964 101,617	1981 24,751
1948 28,922	1965 78,691	1982 25,505
1949 40,775	1966 72,257	1983 26,081
1950 47,705	1967 57,700	1984 24,883
1951 72,798	1968 51,273	1985 23,605
1952 141,056	1969 37,371	1986 23,390
1953 122,241	1970 28,080	1987 22,067
1954 105,244	1971 25,435	1988 19,549
1955 100,108	1972 23,186	1989 20,178
1956 99,434	1973 20,349	1990 16,167
1957 97,408	1974 19,096	1991 13,403
1958 97,358	1975 17,316	1992 10,231
1959 103,473	1976 16,579	1993 11,158
1960 107,002	1977 17,034	1994 12,214
1961 108,475	1978 18,019	1995 13,011
1962 102,348	1979 20,476	1996 13,813*
1963 100,662	1980 22,834	

*projected

Source: Hq. AFROTC, Maxwell AFB, Ala.

has proved a powerful retention tool for the Academy; a similar program may do the same for ROTC.

"By 1998, 600 ROTC cadets will be participating in soaring and free-fall opportunities at the Academy," says General Pamerleau.

As part of their effort to keep ROTC relevant in the era of the new, leaner Air Force, program officials have also taken a hard look at course content and, for the first time in twenty years, have made major changes.

Their effort involved more than just updating textbooks. It focused on "a complete update of the entire curriculum—what's taught, how it's taught, and where in the flow of a cadet's career it's taught," says Lt. Col. Myke Gable, curriculum branch chief at AFROTC headquarters, Maxwell AFB, Ala.

Old ROTC academic course guidelines were thin. Instructors in the field received little more than basic outlines of course information, along

with a recommended reading list for students. The weight of drawing up specific lesson plans—and of adding educational spice to interest students—fell squarely on the shoulders of detachment instructors. Many were up to the task. Some were not.

The result was Curriculum 2000. As part of the project, AFROTC headquarters now provides almost everything needed for classroom instruction except the erasers. The package includes textbooks for students, lesson plans for instructors, and such additional material as lists of suggested questions, motivational steps, even overhead slides.

Instructors "can pick up our package and walk into a classroom and teach with little or no preparation," says Colonel Gable.

It is important to remember that, for its participants, senior ROTC is a

On another level, "more dynamic" means more interesting. The new generation of cadets has been raised not just on Nintendo, but on Super Nintendo with multibit graphics. Measured against that, a lecture with chalkboard and overhead slides is not exactly captivating.

Plans now call for integration of more videos and interactive course work in Curriculum 2000 as soon as possible. War games are an area where this approach might be particularly useful.

At one detachment, ROTC officials are testing a simulated war game that mimics the entire process of national defense, from initial weapon system planning to actual warfighting. Students work together, building up their forces over time, while constrained by "national budgets." The top-ranking students in the class decide on deployments and basing; lower-level cadets become "pilots" who are called on to fly off and fight.

This game approach is particularly useful because cadets learn the concept of planning and the idea that the Air Force of the next century will fly off to fight with aircraft developed and produced decades before. "We're looking at integrating that into the full curriculum next year, possibly," says Colonel Gable. "Right now, we have no simulations or war games in the curriculum. It's mainly guided discussion."

Computer resources are the problem. At the top, the Air Force may field aircraft with the most advanced warfighting technology in the world, but at the ROTC level, it is a struggle just to make sure every cadet has access to a personal computer—even a relatively outdated one.

"I'm looking toward the future: How can I meld information technology with the curriculum system and move us into the next century?" asks Colonel Gable.

ROTC headquarters would like to distribute its learning materials purely through e-mail, on CD-ROMs, or just via computer disk to the field. Right now, they're still stuck with the old print-and-mail methods, mean-

JROTC: Building Citizenship

While ROTC aims to provide young second lieutenants for the Air Force, its little brother—Junior ROTC—is designed to simply provide high-school-age youth a taste of what the military is like.

As they learn about drill, riflery, and leadership, the JROTC cadets may also learn a little something about life. The primary purpose of JROTC is to make better citizens, says Brig. Gen. Susan L. Pamerleau, AFROTC commandant. It is not a recruiting program.

AFJROTC was founded in 1966 with units in twenty high schools. Today, its numbers far surpass those of AFROTC itself. It has 586 units nationwide with more than 67,000 students enrolled.

Scholarships are not part of the JROTC program, although graduates can earn credits applicable toward ROTC requirements. Typically, a JROTC class is an elective that youngsters can choose in lieu of physical education. Instructors are retired Air Force commissioned or noncommissioned officers. For the most part, they are full-time teachers at high schools where the units are located and are paid by the local school district.

The curriculum is sixty percent aerospace science and forty percent leadership education. Many units have drill teams or color guards that appear at school functions.

Pentagon plans call for JROTC programs in all US military services to undergo major expansions. The Air Force plans to add twenty-three JROTC units next year, topping out its program at 609 participating educational institutions.

Some communities have resisted JROTC expansion, and a handful of school boards have voted to end programs in recent years. Some critics complain that the program is really meant to lure impressionable youth into military service. (About five percent of AFJROTC grads eventually serve in some branch of the armed forces, according to service statistics.)

The stronger reason is financial: Most schools that decline JROTC do not want to pay for an instructor, though the Pentagon will subsidize their salaries in the first years of a new program.

ing a twelve-page pamphlet now sitting on headquarters desks will take two and a half months to reach ROTC cadets.

Going Online

By 2000, ROTC officials hope all detachments will be online to the point where they can receive e-mail and access a cyber-library of military books held at Maxwell AFB or some other electronic depository. Computerized interactive courseware is a goal, as is video-teleconferencing and other new distance-learning techniques.

Such changes "cost a lot" admits Colonel Gable. "You can't go to pure distance learning at the drop of a hat."

Nor is support for such changes consistent among all ROTC institutions. Some colleges and universities already provide cadets with computers, audiovisual projectors, and classrooms dedicated to ROTC education. Other administrations are not so supportive. Some universities

shuttle ROTC from classroom to classroom throughout the school year, making storage of even basic educational materials difficult.

Not that ROTC is returning to the days when it was a controversial campus presence—except for a few isolated incidents. In fact, a number of colleges have reacted strongly to hints that they might lose their AFROTC programs. In 1994, the Pentagon set an ROTC viability standard: Detachments that did not produce an average of fifteen lieutenants a year would be closed. When AFROTC officials warned institutions in danger of losing their units, some eagerly sought to work with the service and keep their programs.

Room-and-board scholarships were one result. By law, ROTC can pay only for cadet tuition, books, and fees, but some schools have taken the prospective loss of AFROTC so seriously that they have set aside upward of \$1 million for room-and-board subsidies.

A few institutions may still lose their programs, but overall "it's been a tremendous outpouring on the part of universities who want to be a partner in assisting us with young people," says General Pamerleau. ■

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