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A College's Impact on the Air War of WWII

Cannon Marchand

World War II, for the United States, relied on men from every background and experience to fill the ranks and complete the necessary tasks towards eventual victory. A diverse nation with a diverse populous was required to be trained and made uniform into the military in a short period of time. The whole of American society and institutions had to adapt to support the war effort and the men fighting. Colleges across the country would also find manners in which to help win the war. An example of a college that changed to help students become soldiers is the Nebraska State Teachers College at Kearney or NSTC¹. This institution serves a case example of colleges that during the war hosted pilot training programs for the Army and Navy. These training programs would serve as critical sources of pilots and crewmembers during the war.

The NSTC was a small college that existed in central Nebraska to train and educate high school graduates to teach kindergarten through high school levels. The institution was not providing diverse degree offerings in business or medical studies; it was training teachers. This is

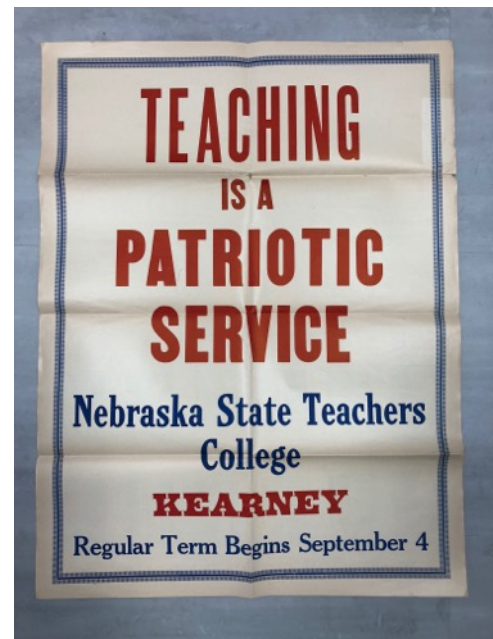


Figure 1.1 Poster from NSTC 1944 Quarterly Bulletin. "UNK Library Special Collections and Archives".

¹ NSTC at Kearney is currently called the University of Nebraska at Kearney. The institution has also been called Nebraska State Normal School and Kearney State College. Any future mention of UNK in the paper is referring the same institution as NSTC at Kearney in its more recent existence.

not to say the course offerings were not diverse themselves. Teachers in the public education system were expected to be qualified to teach many diverse subject areas. NSTC at Kearney was also not a unique institution in design or even name. State Teacher Colleges existed around the country and developed out of State Normal schools. All states had a need for teachers and understood that training was needed outside the high school level to effectively provide greater instruction to pupils. This also was a more impressive task during the time in American History up to WWII. Not graduating high school was not uncommon, and not attending college was a norm.

It is through an in-depth study of NSTC at Kearney that a better understanding of how the trained manpower that flew the American planes of World War II will be gained. UNK, the successor institution to the NSTC, has a large archival source of information about the men from the school that fought in the war including the jobs they had, their wartime experiences, and how they died. The archival sources also explain how the college itself was changed to support the war. These sources serve as a collective biography of many men all united through the role NSTC at Kearney played in their training. After understanding these sources it can be asserted that by providing course work, training, but most importantly a capable source of men who were willing to fight and endure the costs of war NSTC at Kearney, and other similar colleges across the country, played an instrumental role in the air war during WWII.

Understanding the historical development of American air power is the first necessary step in understanding air power during WWII. The earliest aerial precursor to the modern Air Force was the reconnaissance balloons that developed during the Civil War and continued in use up into the time of the Wright brothers. The early balloons fell under the Army Signal Corps and the first aircraft would as well. The first mechanical air plane was bought by the Army Signal

Corps in 1908, and instead of being bought as a viable weapon it was more of argument proving the theory of sustained flight via winged prop driven aircraft vs. balloons and airships.²

Aircraft would see very rapid development after 1908 and through WWI. The importance of aviation as a military concept would become increasingly apparent. The Army as an institution would never lead the way in development of aviation, but would serve as the host institution to individual aviators who would lead in the development of aerial assets. By the start of WWI, the U.S. Army had developed more effective planes, however still rudimentary, and more importantly began establishing the qualifications for pilots and their distinctness as separate military occupational domain. The war in Europe and the large amount of funds that warring European powers put into developing air forces also spurred the U.S. Army to follow suit. The American Expeditionary Forces and Army as a whole were forced to develop air forces that could fight with their French and British allies against the Germans in the sky. By the conclusion of the war pilots had gone from shooting handguns from their planes at each other to fixed machine guns on faster and more maneuverable airplanes. The Army by 1918 now also had over 11,000 men trained in the roles of both pilot and flying support positions like bombardiers. Tens of thousands more mechanics had been trained, and almost \$2 billion had been appropriated for the Army winged fighters.³

The interwar period would see increased recognition of the importance of air power and the establishment of an Army Air Corps that was separate from the Signal Corps or any other

² “*We wanted Wings: A history of the aviation cadet program.*” From the Air Education and Training Command, United States Air Force, Published 2005, 16-18.

³ Allison, William. Grey, Jeffery. Valentine, Janet. *American Military History A survey from colonial Times to the Present Second Edition*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Books (2013); Bruce Ashcroft, “*We wanted Wings: A history of the aviation cadet program.*” From the Air Education and Training Command, United States Air Force, Published 2005, 16-18.

part of the Army. These developments were not spearheaded by the Army and general military leadership. Many of the leaders of the military still did not accept the importance that air power would play in a traditional war. Instead, most of the energy for establishing and funding a distinct Air Corps would come from fervent aviation officers such as Billy Mitchell, who was more importantly an enthusiastic public that would spend the 1920s and 1930s being wowed by the exploits of Charles Lindbergh and many others.⁴ The aircraft and the men that flew them were so new and exciting to the public that they really captivated peoples' attention. Enough so that members of Congress felt it necessary to order the creation of the Air Corps over the judgment of many military leaders. The excitement of flying would also be important for the men growing up during the time. The young children of the 1920s would be the men that would fight in World War II, be inspired to becoming aviators, and attend NSTC at Kearney.⁵

The Air Corps was formally established in 1926 and would continue until 1941. In 1941 the organization was replaced by the Army Air Forces or AAF, which would be near independent of the Army. The Army Air Corps was still always hampered by older prevailing thoughts from Army General leadership and importantly, had to compete for funds. By 1941 leaders outside the Army, most importantly President Franklin Roosevelt, foresaw the coming war and realized the increased need of air assets. Assets not only to build U.S. air power, but

⁴ Billy Mitchell was an aviation officer during WWI. He spent most of the inter war years fighting with Army and Navy leadership over the importance and tactical viability of Air power. He advocated for the creation of an independent Air Force. He made strong use of connections in Congress to get what he wanted. His arguments and habit of going around superiors would see him court martialed. Eventually he would resign his commission, but is rightly remembered of one of the founders of the Air Force.

⁵ Allison, William. Grey, Jeffery. Valentine, Janet. *American Military History A survey from colonial Times to the Present Second Edition*". Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Books (2013); Bruce Ashcroft, "*We wanted Wings: A history of the aviation cadet program.*" From the Air Education and Training Command, United States Air Force, Published 2005, 36.

British allies as well. The Air Corps had in 1940 around 1,200 aircraft and near 30,000 officers. In 1941, through the creation of the Army Air Forces, that strength swelled to over 300,000 officers and 3,000 planes. FDR, famously, had also ordered an annual production of over 50,000 planes a year. In order to support both British and Russian allies while still building the U.S. military's own planes for war, tens of thousands of aircraft certainly would be needed.⁶

Production of aircraft would be difficult. Finding the raw materials and designing the aircraft needed to win the war challenged leaders during the war. Another significant struggle was finding men to pilot, crew, and support all these new aircraft being pressed into service. This is an immense task when you consider that even driving automobiles during the 1920s and 1930s was not necessarily something that everyone had access to, and education levels were low. High school diplomas were not required for many jobs. Yet hundreds of thousands of people were needed to operate machines that were so complex to people of the time it is analogous to the spaceships of today.

The first formal training schools for aviators were established in 1917 by the Army. Congress approved and appropriated funds to establish the facilities, the recalling of active duty officers to run the schools, and the establishment of the rank and position of aviation cadet. The development of schools during the early period was difficult, but necessary to meet the needs of the U.S. during WWI. The early flight schools struggled greatly with figuring out how to teach individual pilots to fly. The Army reluctantly was forced to send many of their flying cadets to training in England and France. The early inter-war period through the 1920s also would see struggles in producing pilots, due primarily to a lack of funding from the military, but also from

⁶ Donald L. Miller, *Master of Air America's Bomber boys who fought the air war against Nazi Germany*, New York: Simon and Schussler, (2006), 43-45; Expansion to air Power 1944 US Army Air Forces. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWnvc-X4e-0>

such a small pool of candidates they were allowed to train. Slowly a formulated flight school was developed that could take an untrained civilian man in his late teens or early twenties and in a couple of years produce not only a trained pilot, but a commissioned Army officer in the grade of Second Lieutenant.⁷

The specifics of flight training that were identified as necessary both in the early 1920s and into WWII were varied and broad in difficulty. It started with taking cadets and placing them in a basic flight training program. They first learned basic military domain knowledge of drill and ceremony, proper customs and courtesies, and military history. They would next transition into technical training of the principles of navigation and theories behind flight. They also would progress from training flights with an instructor to eventual solo flights without any assistance. The washout rate was high in all areas of flight school. Some men could not make it academically, and others could not adequately fly the planes. Even though a relatively small number of men were trained in the 1920s, and the Army Air Corps did establish a successful training program that would be first draft towards the successful training programs of the future.⁸

⁷ Bruce Ashcroft, "*We wanted Wings: A history of the aviation cadet program.*" From the Air Education and Training Command, United States Air Force, Published 2005, 18-19.

⁸ Ibid, 20-25

The 1930s would be the next most important time for the flight schools, and bring the flight training almost to what was achieved during World War II. The first addition was the increased educational requirements of applicants. Instead of just a high school diploma being



Figure 1.3. Aviation Cadet Charles Peter Haney is an example of an Aviation cadet from NSTC at Kearney. He would die in 1942 from complications following appendicitis "UNK Library Special Collections and Archives".

needed, two entire years of college were now required. A background that included study in the subjects of math and physics were also made mandatory for Air Corps cadets. Flight school academics were intensified. Another change was the introduction of specialization in the jobs that flying cadets were trained to do. In the past, cadets were given instruction on not only how to be pilots but other functional areas like navigation. This was changed to where the flying cadet would now specialize in either being a pilot, bombardier, or navigator, but not all three. The failure rate was even higher during the 1930s. Around 1.5% of cadets would die in training accidents and a little over 50% would fail outright. Aviation Cadet Charles Haney would be a future example of a cadet in the Army's training from

NSTC. He died as a cadet from complications of appendicitis. Training facilities and quotas for pilots would all be expanded through the end of the 1930s as well. By the eve of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Air Corps had positioned itself with a standardized and proven training program to produce necessary men equipped to fly aircraft. It would be able to meet most but not all training needs during World War II.⁹

⁹ Bruce Ashcroft, "*We wanted Wings: A history of the aviation cadet program.*" From the Air Education and Training Command, United States Air Force, Published 2005, 27-29.

During WWII, as previously discussed, a massive amount of manpower was required to operate the massive amount of aircraft being built. To meet the increased needs for manpower the training of pilots, navigators, and bombardiers would need to be changed. The first major change was in physical training centers. Randolph Field in Texas had been the Army Air Corps and later Army Air Forces primary initial training center since the 1920s. More space would be needed to train all the necessary pilots and support crew for the aircraft. Initial training centers would be expanded to multiple fields in Texas, Oklahoma, California and Alabama.¹⁰

The second change was in name. Instead of flying cadet it would now be aviation cadet. With this name change applicants now would accept a commission in the Army upon completion of their training. If they failed, they would be forced to accept an enlisted position based on the needs of the Army. Although there were still many enlisted support positions within the Army Air Force that need to be filled, many washouts would still find themselves in the aviation field. The men also saw increased benefits in pay, allowances, and life insurance policies.¹¹

Before any person could be accepted to any training program, standards had to be set that could effectively screen for applicants that could actually pass the rigorous training programs. The medical standards were straightforward in the sense that only the men at the peak of physical health would be accepted for flying positions. The educational standards, however, were a little bit more complex. In 1940, education beyond high school was not the norm. Most men had only high school diplomas. Before the war and up to 1942 two years of college was required. After 1942 this requirement would be relaxed, to just a high school diploma. All applicants still had to

¹⁰ Ibid, 25-31.

¹¹ Ibid, 31.

take the Aviation Cadet Qualifying Exam or ACQE and get a high enough score for admission to training. Being a pilot actually required the lowest score. Bombardiers and then navigators required the highest scores to be admitted. This was also a challenge for the Army because becoming a pilot was already the most popular position, so at times men had to be forced into the navigation and bombardier schools.¹²

Even with the removal of college credit as a requirement, college classes still made an applicant far more likely to succeed in both being admitted to, training, and successfully completing training. This was not lost on the AAF leadership, so they created the College Training Program or CTP to provide college instruction to applicants and to help the Army improve already admitted applicants that could not start training until the overloaded training centers could accept them. The CTP would also be inspired by other more basic aviation training programs that had existed on some college campus through the Army intermediately from WWI to WWII. The College Training Program would be administered at 153 colleges and require applicants to take courses in math and physics while also receiving some basic military instruction. The CTP would see over the course of the war would see over a 100,000 men matriculate through the program. The extra training and classroom instruction would make better applicants and would represent a massive source of manpower for the AAF. Men could now be recruited from colleges themselves into AAF. This was attractive to many men as they would receive a deferment from active duty service, at least for a while, to continue their studies and avoid frontline service. If men failed training or could not meet the high standards for being a pilot, navigator, or bombardier, which were all officer positions, they could be absorbed into the

¹² Ibid, 33-34.

enlisted support positions of the AAF that were also greatly needed. Overall the CTP was a critical source of manpower for the AAF during WWII and helped the U.S. win the air war. To better understand the program examining it on an individual institution level is necessary.¹³

The Nebraska State Teachers College at Kearney or NSTC was like many other colleges across the United States. It provided advanced education to young men and women in the pursuit of becoming educators. When the war broke out the students and staff at Kearney took an active stance on helping the war effort. College President Herbert Cushing would be an outspoken advocate in support of students during and after the war. He would also provide the critical leadership at the institutional level that would see students supported in their paths toward joining the military. On December 12th, 1941 he set the course the college would take by announcing, "As a college...we must assist in every possible way in bringing the war to a successful conclusion."¹⁴ He also would see Kearney's selection as an CTP institution and appoint staff to administer the program.¹⁵

The inclusion of the CTP at Kearney had many benefits and implications for the institution, not all in selfless defense of the nation. The attack on Pearl Harbor and the early news of the beginning of the war instilled in many young men feelings of eagerness or obligation to enlist in the military. It was not ideal for a college to see all of its male students leave the college.

¹³ Bruce Ashcroft, "*We wanted Wings: A history of the aviation cadet program.*" From the Air Education and Training Command, United States Air Force, Published 2005, 37; Quarterly Bulletin Nebraska State Teachers College Kearney, Nebraska, April 1942, UNK 1931-1955 folder, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library.

¹⁴ "Cushing Outlines Responsibilities For Defense Minded NSTC Students", *The Antelope*, December 12, 1941.

¹⁵ Quarterly Bulletin Nebraska State Teachers College Kearney, Nebraska, April 1942, UNK 1931-1955 folder, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library.

For example, the lost tuition would make it hard to run the institution. Also, it was better for men at colleges to take a more deliberate approach to service, as the college-educated would be the primary source of officers for the military. The student newspaper *The Antelope*, in the days following the Pearl Harbor attacks, headlined with Cushing saying, "I believe that I know what you are thinking... You are a somewhat select group. You have more than average educational preparation. Those of you who feel called upon to volunteer... I do not seek to dissuade you from that purpose. I glory in it. I do urge that you exercise certain caution... in order that your talent may be use to the best possible advantage."¹⁶ Cushing was not saying that enlisted service as a basic service as an infantryman was any less important or honorable than serving in a role that required more education like an officer, but he was advocating that his students acknowledge they had skills that could better serve the nation in other more deliberate manners.

¹⁶ "Cushing Asks NSTC Students to Exercise Self Control Judgement in War Crisis", *The Antelope*, December 12, 1941.

The more deliberate manner that would attract the most students was service in the air. The air plane was still relatively new and attractive to young people. It was an adventure that was, in the most colloquial sense, sexy.

Flying was a capacity that students would want to serve in. The CTP was the perfect trifecta of benefits for all parties. The Army got more qualified aviators, the college kept more students, and could participate in a meaningful way in the war, and the student could defer service to complete more school and eventually serve in an exciting and new part of the military. It is for this all-around symbiotic relationship that NSTC at Kearney embraced aviation as its role and identity in the war. Training aviators

and sending men to fight in the skies was the identity Kearney would not only embrace but advertise to Nebraska and its current and potential students. The quarterly bulletin was a college advertisement that the NSTC used as its main way to showcase the institution to the outside and students. The 1942 edition featured many connections to men serving in the war and especially in aviation. The most practical item to then-students would have been the advertisement for the cadet program at the college. Potential students would see that they could serve in WWII while

Aviation Cadet Program....

The college will cooperate with the U. S. Army Air Forces in offering an Aviation Cadet Training Program. The program calls for the enlistment of 54,000 college men between the ages of 18 to 26 years inclusive. The chief features of the program are:

1. Candidates for flying officers commissions now take a simplified mental examination, designed to determine intelligence and aptitude, instead of submitting evidence of formal education.
2. Candidates for both ground and flying officers commissions may now enlist in the Army Air Force Enlisted Reserve on a deferred basis and continue their college education until graduation.

DEFERRED SERVICE

To college men who wish to continue their education to the extent that war conditions will permit, the revised program offers an opportunity to enlist on a deferred basis and to continue college courses through graduation before being called to active duty, subject to call, in case of necessity, by direction of the Secretary of War. Applicants from men under 21 years of age must carry the consent of the parents. All applicants must present three letters of recommendation from reputable citizens to whom the applicant is known. All applicants must pass a physical examination. President Cushing has appointed William L. Nicholas, Dean of Men as the Director of the Aviation Cadet Program for the college at Kearney. See Dean Nicholas if you are interested or write for further information.

Navy Offers Program Through Accredited Colleges....

"The Secretary of the Navy has approved the enlistment in the Naval Reserve of young men enrolled in accredited colleges, who, after enlistment in the Naval Reserve, may continue in college at their own expense, and in addition, be given training in an inactive naval status with a view to further expansion of procurement and training of prospective naval officers," says a statement carried in a Navy Department bulletin issued under date of March 1, 1942.

Applicants must be:

- Not less than 17 and under 26 years of age
- Of firstman or sophomore rank
- Planning a course leading to a Baccalaureate Degree
- A regularly registered full time student in good standing
- Of good repute

Applicants must:

- Complete a one-year course of college mathematics
- Take a course in trigonometry

The Navy will accept voluntary enlistment as Apprentice Seaman (V-1) of not more than 30,000 men per year.

Upon the completion of approximately 1 1/2 calendar years of college work on the approved program he will take a comprehensive examination of the objective type prepared by the Navy Department.

Approximately 20,000 V-1 men will be selected yearly for transfer to class V-1 for Aviation Cadet Flight training. Certain selected students ranking high in the examination will be permitted to finish at least two calendar years of college before being transferred to the V-7 program for training to be an officer pilot.

Approximately 15,000 students ranking sufficiently high in the examination will be transferred to V-7 and permitted to continue their college courses up to the Baccalaureate Degree. The remaining 45,000 (approximately) will be permitted to finish two calendar years of the pre-induction training program of the college and will then be called to active duty as Apprentice Seaman. They will be sent to Naval Training Schools and then ordered to general service in an enlisted status. Those who successfully complete the V-7 aviation cadet training or the V-7 Reserve Midshipman will be commissioned Ensigns in the United States Naval Reserve.

For further detailed information write directly to the Director, Navy V-1 Program, State Teachers College, Kearney, Nebraska.

Graduate in Three Years....

It has been possible for many years, through summer school attendance to graduate at Kearney in three years. Those who desire to do so may earn twelve semester hours of credit this summer.

It is estimated that the cost of attending the summer session at Kearney for the same weeks term will be about as follows:

Maintenance	5.00
Tuition	4.50
Contingent, medical etc.	15.00
Total	24.50

If you plan to attend for twelve weeks add \$2.50 to the above. Rooms may be occupied at the residence halls for \$1.50 per week. The best of food is served at the cafeteria at very low prices.

Figure 1.3 1942 Quarterly Bulletin announcing benefits of the Army College Training Program. The Navy program was a much smaller, but similar flight training program also offered at UNK. "UNK Library Special Collections and Archives".

at the college in Kearney. The pictures of former students that were now serving as aviators would have been alluring.

Students at Kearney would, through their newspaper and yearbooks, greatly emphasize aviation. *The Antelope* would not feature any recruiting ads for its male students other than those that were for air service. A large advertisement that appeared in *The Antelope* in May of 1942 featured a large B-17 bomber and offered the many ways college men could enter the service in “The Greatest Air Army in the World.”¹⁷ They were bombarded by not bombs but by advertisements featuring planes and the multitude of benefits that they could capitalize on by

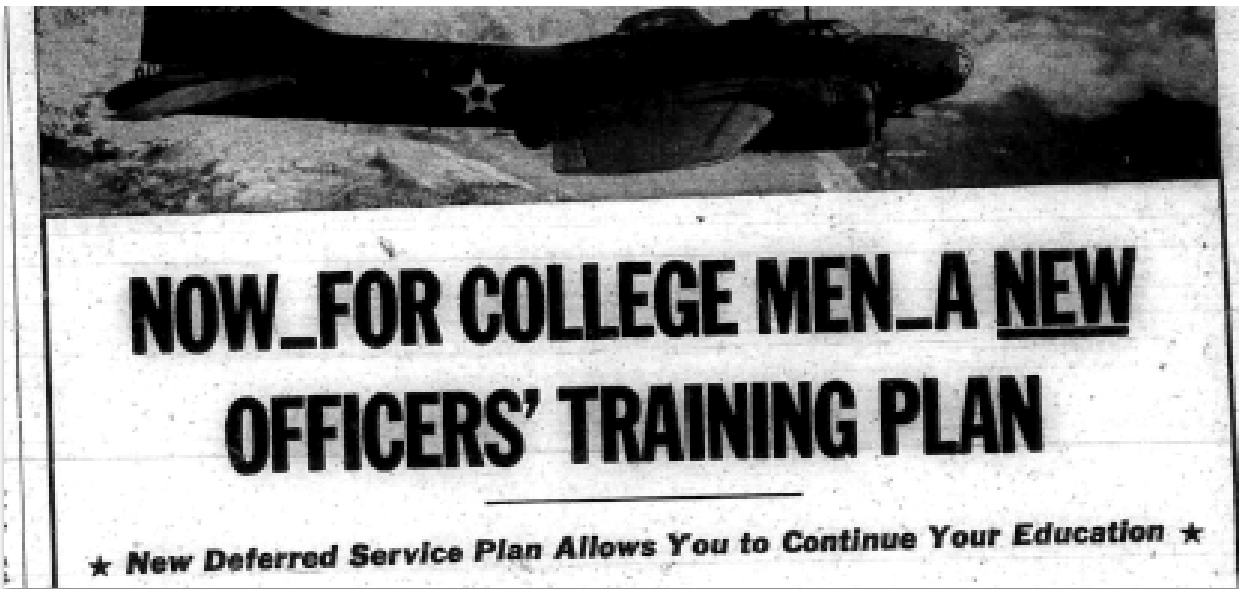


Figure 1.5. Army advertisement from *The Antelope*. “UNK Library Special Collections and Archives”.

becoming an aviation cadet. The yearbook in 1943 featured an image of an aggressive fighter plane diving downwards in a section dedicated to the men that had joined the military titled, “To

¹⁷ “Now for College Men A New Officers’ Training Plan”, *The Antelope*, May 1, 1942.

the Men of Kearney.” The students at NSTC were both adopting and seeing aviation as an attractive means of service.¹⁸



Figure 1.4. Cover Page of a NSTC Quarterly Bulletin from 1941. “UNK Library Special Collections and Archives”.

The Army and *The Antelope* were not as active as the college itself was in advertising itself to aerial service. NSTC at Kearney made aviation its identity. It did this by working through its Quarterly Bulletin publications. These were part advertisements to current and potential college applicants and were course description books describing graduation requirements, academic policies, and individual class details. From 1941 to the end of the war these publications were filled with references to students in the aviation service. The front page of the July 1941 edition featured a full-page image of young pilot and former student stepping down from his aircraft and with the title, “Kearney’s Place In National Defense”.¹⁹

The message could not be any clearer in its principle publication for students and the rest of Nebraska to see. This was how NSTC at Kearney was going to help win the war. The program would start sometime in late 1941, although it would not be until the later April 1942 bulletin edition that the college would formally announce the aspects of the college training program for current and potential students. The announcement also featured the image of Second Lieutenant Elmer McKinney in his dress uniform a successful example of what the college was providing to

¹⁸ *Blue and Gold* yearbook 1943, 4-5.

¹⁹ Quarterly Bulletin Nebraska State Teachers College Kearney, Nebraska, Vol. XXXIV No. 3 July, 1941, UNK 1931-1955 folder, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library.

students. McKinney was described as, “a young man possessed of a clear head, a steady hand and exemplary habits.”²⁰ This is the kind of student Kearney was producing and they wanted to proclaim this to those outside the college.

Other than just talking about the CTP program the college did make some slight academic changes to actual academics to better facilitate preparing students for both aviation and war service in general. The most major change was emphasizing summer sessions and allowing high school students to begin taking some college coursework. Both of these new policies allowed a student to shorten graduation time by an entire year. The college would also give full credit for some courses that a student could not complete if they were called to active duty service. For the CTP program a larger emphasis and more offerings of credits in math, science and other subjects pertinent for military service were created. All in all, the changes to the curriculum were not a difficult adaptation for NSTC to support aviation cadets and the war effort as a whole.²¹

The next significant, perhaps most important point, of discussion about NSTC's role in winning the air war is the men who served. Unfortunately, there is no complete list of every member of AAF during WWII from NSTC. However, a list does exist of all the service members who died during the war. The list was compiled by Carrie Ludden, the Dean of Women, in the years following the War at NSTC and was later featured in the 1945 bulletin which

20 Quarterly Bulletin Nebraska State Teachers College Kearney, Nebraska, April 1942, UNK 1931-1955 folder, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library.

²¹ “New College Courses Discussed by Cushing,” *The Antelope*, March 6, 1942; Amber Alexander, “Training Teachers in a changing world: The impact of World War II on Nebraska State Teachers College.” Presented at Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha Nebraska, March 2015.

memorialized all those who died from the institution during the war. From the list important conclusions can be drawn about NSTC and the Air War. The first point is that 33 men from NSTC died in the war. Of that number, 23 were involved in aviation.²² This is significantly large number of men affiliated with aviation. Aviation was deadly but not statistically more so than ground combat. This list can then be used to highlight that a majority of students from NSTC served in the Air War during WWII. The list also details the manner of death of many of the men from NSTC. A majority of the men that died from the AAF were on bombers, such as B-17s or B-29s. This was not because students did not want to fly fighters - they did. One student even named his P-40 fighter plane *Antelope*. They mostly served on bombers because bombers represented the most produced type of plane during the war. Bombers also required typically over ten men to crew them and at least two pilots. So out of sheer need the bombing war is where most NSTC men would serve.²³

²² 19 were in the AAF the other 4 that died were in either the Marine or Navy Air Corps. The college was also affiliated with the Navy V-12 Program that also had the goal of producing pilots. It was however much smaller than the Army's aviation program.

²³ Donald K. Briggs Collection, Date Unknown, Briggs Box 23 Folder 4 Envelopes 5, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library; Quarterly Bulletin Nebraska State Teachers College Kearney, Nebraska, 1 June 1945, UNK 1931-1955 folder, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library; John C. McManus, *Grunts*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 1-13; Office of Statistical Control, "Army Air Forces Statistical Digest World War II", From the United States Airforce, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a542518.pdf>.

To better understand the role of the NSTC students, examining individual students in detail provides a better understanding of the CTP program and the contributions the NSTC made to the air war. Donald Wayne Johnson was among the first NSTC students to die in the war. He predated the CTP program at NSTC, but did set a very visible example of service in the Army Air Forces. He was from Dunning, Nebraska and attended NSTC from 1936 to 1940. While attending he was very active in the college. He was involved in a fraternity and was a star player of both the basketball and baseball teams. He was an incredibly popular student at NSTC and received a good deal of attention in the student newspaper. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940 and would eventually pass flight training from Randolph Field in July of 1940. Once he commissioned, he would serve as an instructor on

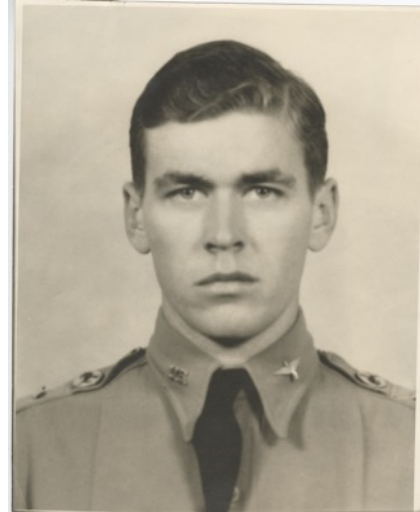


Figure 1.5. Lt. Donald Johnson.
“UNK Library Special Collections and Archives”.

B-17 bombers for the R.A.F. in England and later American pilots in the U.S. On February 1, 1942 the plane B-17 he was flying on during a training mission in Arizona encountered mechanical troubles and he ordered his crew to bail out while he tried to keep the plane flying for as long as possible. He died in the resulting crash. He was described as one of Nebraska's most famous pilots and was attributed to helping convince Army officials to install more bullet resistant glass on B-17s after seeing damage to them from R.A.F missions in England. Johnson's

service was highlighted in many sources across campus and he was portrayed as a hero. His image would have inspired other NSTC students.²⁴

Another example would be Tech Sergeant Richard Strand. He was not an officer, but very likely could be an example of a student that went through the CTP, but was not able to complete the rigorous flight school and then enlisted in the AAF. He would be among the last men from NSTC to die in the war. He served as a crew member on a B-29 named *Lassie Come Home* for most of the war. This plane was so damaged during one part of a mission that it had to be scrapped. He would complete an impressive 25 bombing missions during the war. He was killed on a new plane during a night bombing campaign over Tokyo on May 24, 1945. His plane was the lead pathfinder plane in the formation and was heavily damaged during the attack. The plane was destroyed by enemy fire. He was awarded multiple medals after his death which included the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, and four oak Leaf Clusters. Johnson and Strand are only two examples of the AAF members from NSTC. Other men from the college also died and many more lived after doing their service in WWII in the air. Through examining them the impact of NSTC and the air war is best seen.²⁵

Many others from Kearney would serve in aviation related jobs in the military a total of 22 men from NSTC died in aviation related jobs. They filled diverse roles through the course of the war. The majority would die in plane crashes as far asway as the Marianas Islands and the English Channel, but as close as Olathe, Kansas. These crashes were caused by enemy fire, but

²⁴ Donald K. Briggs Collection, Date Unknown, Briggs Box 23 Folder 4 Envelopes 5, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library; "These Make Mailing List Successful; Last Letter from Lt. Don W. Johnson," *The Antelope*, April 10, 1942.

²⁵ Donald K. Briggs Collection, Date Unknown, Briggs Box 23 Folder 4 Envelopes 5, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library.

also faulty aircraft and pilot error. Most of the men were either lieutenants or crewmembers holding the rank of Sergeant. The majority of the men served as bomber crewmembers as well. The records from UNK's archives indicate that almost all the men were on either B-17s or B-29s. The majority of the men serving on bombers originates for the fact that there were more bombers than fighters and they required more crewmembers than a single seat fighter did. NSTC at Kearney men were a small minority of the total men that served in aviation in WWII, but they were everywhere there was fighting and they served in the most crucial campaigns of the war.²⁶

The rapid building of the Air Forces of the United States represents one of the most impressive accomplishments of the Second World War. To establish that force many planes were needed, but more importantly, many more trained men were needed to fly and support those planes during the war. The Army would struggle to meet those needs of manpower. It would have to take its already established pilot training programs and greatly expand them to the accommodate the much greater need for airmen. The sources of manpower that would supply the Army Air Forces would be the nation's colleges. The Army needed educated men who could pass the rigorous training requirements to become aviators. The creation of the College Training Program at colleges around the country were critical in supplying that educated manpower and thus were critical in winning the war. The fast-paced development of the Air Force since WWII and the drama of the fighting in the sky itself has attracted most of the attention of historians but left the training of aviators rather unknown.

The role colleges played in the Air War was critical and should not be forgotten. The Nebraska State Teachers College at Kearney is a good example of the important role colleges

²⁶ Donald K. Briggs Collection, Date Unknown, Briggs Box 23 Folder 4 Envelopes 5, University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives and Special Collections, UNK Library.

played in WWII. Through the college's changes in educational offerings, its adoption of a CTP, and most importantly its provision of a willing source of manpower, Kearney's role in the air war was very significant. The NSTC's role was significant because of the sacrifices of students, suffered through the war, and most of all those that died. Today, the University of Nebraska at Kearney, the successor institution to NSTC, has a large archival collection that serves as a collective biography and highlights the service of men who died from Kearney during the war. The source shows that of the over thirty NSTC men who died in the war twenty-two were in aviation related positions. The majority of the NSTC service members who served in the war were aviators and represent a case study for how colleges thorough aviation cadet training programs produced the men that won the air war during WWII.

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