

MILITARY TRAINING STRESSED EARLY AT TENNESSEE TECH

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Since the beginning of World War I, Thomas Alva Early, the first president of Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, tirelessly worked towards having a military training program at Tennessee Polytechnic Institute (TPI). Originally, Early wanted all male students at TPI to wear uniforms and participate in mandatory military training. Early wanted the male students to wear the uniforms both on campus and within a five-mile radius of campus. Early also wanted female students to wear a uniform and be trained in “exercises auxiliary to military service and suitable to the needs of women, such as setting-up exercise, gymnasium, and folk games.” When Early presented this idea to the Tennessee State Board of Education, they quickly rejected the idea.

Despite the Tennessee State Board of Education set back, Thomas Early did not relinquish his dreams of having military training at TPI. After Early’s persistent requests, the Board of Education passed a resolution favoring military training at TPI. Shortly after the passing of this resolution, the Student Army Training Corps (SATC) was created at TPI. The SATC program was part of a national initiative that was created by the War Department Committee on Education and Special Training. Throughout the United States, approximately 600 universities, technical schools, trade school, and professional schools hosted SATC programs for the War Department. Twenty schools in Tennessee had a SATC program including Vanderbilt University, University of Tennessee, and Fisk University. Roughly 100 male students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four joined the SATC program at TPI when it began in September 1918, for a total of 210 total by the completion of the program.

The SATC program at TPI was similar to the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) programs that we are familiar with today. At TPI, students in the program attended lectures about war in general as well as the war initiatives at the time. These lectures helped prepare students with the background knowledge they would need. Students also went through training for auto repair and radio operation. Students who chose to be in the SATC program were also inducted into the military.

The SATC program at TPI had many benefits for students; those in the SATC program received an allowance for housing, board, and food. These students also received a pay of thirty dollars a month, which was equivalent to a private’s pay at the time. In addition to the benefits students received while in the program, graduates of the program went into the military at the rank of officer. This elevated rank meant better pay and more opportunities for advancement. Young men from all over the state solicited Early for information about the program or entry into it.

The Student Army Training Program at Tennessee Polytechnic Institute was important to both TPI and the United States of America. The SATC program was instrumental in preparing men across the country to serve in World War I. Because of the SATC

program, many TPI students gained knowledge and experience that allowed them to be the best soldiers possible. Many men were better prepared to serve their country thanks to TPI's Student Army Training Program.

*Read more about Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>