

Naval Flight Training Base Stationed at William Jewell College

By Marcie White



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The days of World War II affected all areas of American life. It was the most united Americas have ever been during a war in terms of support, efforts on the home front, and efforts in fighting overseas. Liberty, Missouri, made a significant contribution to these efforts. From January 1, 1943 until October 1, 1944, William Jewell College participated in a Naval Flight Training program that encouraged private colleges throughout the mid-west to host a small contingent of pilots who were training for battle in World War II. During this time 2,943 naval cadets in the Naval Flight Preparatory

School, and 728 men in the Navy Academic Refresher Unit spent at least three months on Jewell's campus. At the end the program, a total of 3,711 men graduated.

Normally, there were 600 cadets on campus, as well as regularly enrolled students. There were 192 class periods each day, six days per week for 16 weeks. Students participated in 240 hours of ground instruction in full-time courses, and upon graduation they were relocated to fly airplanes. Room and board were provided in Ely Hall. All cadets received life insurance, medical care, and hospitalization if needed. Under the command of Lt. W.O. Bice, who first led the program, and later Lt. James O. Austin, the flight school was efficient and well-organized.

At one point, there were three schools operating on the Jewell campus at one time: the regular college classes, the National Flight Preparatory School, and the Navy Academic Refresher Unit. Eventually, the National Flight Preparatory School was closed, and the college classes and Refresher Unit coexisted until the Navy Academic Refresher Unit closed on December 13, 1945.

The Navy Academic Refresher Unit first started receiving cadets on July 27, 1944. The men were classified into three groups, according to their needs. There was one section for men whose background had sufficiently prepared them to pass the coursework in eight weeks. In addition to this, there were three sections of academic coursework that were to be completed in 16 weeks, and there was also one other section that gave 24 weeks to finish the required classes. Upon graduation, the cadets would enter the regular Navy Pre-Flight School at another location.

Liberty citizens welcomed the officers, even throwing Lt. Austin's wife a welcoming tea party. Approximately 200 new families moved to Liberty. The presence of cadets boosted telegraph office and post office business exponentially, and there were even several marriages that resulted from the navy cadets' presence.

After World War II ended in 1944, the need for Navy training schools such as the National Flight Preparatory School and the Navy Academic Refresher Unit were no longer needed, so the schools closed, leaving William Jewell College to its normal routines.

Works Cited

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