

26 November 1968

*also sent to Faculty
5 Dec. 68*

To the Executive Committee of Dartmouth College
Dear Friends:

All of us have now read the admirably lucid report on the ROTC prepared for our Executive Committee. Those of us who expected a spirited defense of military education did not find it; instead we discovered a reasoned analysis showing the failure of ROTC training to meet high educational standards. We can scarcely fault such criticism --- it strikes a blow for us all as serious professors.

I do not wish to split hairs over this report. Its language never obscures the intent: To get rid of ROTC, but not quite! But why go to such elaborate lengths to maintain such an inadequate (for the Army) program? Surely the Army, under those strictures as are here suggested, could just as well manage the whole procurement problem independent of Dartmouth. Why then do the authors of this report not grasp the ultimate nettle and simply rid our college of its military connections?

The reasons offered may be summarized by certain central phrases:

1. "ROTC is not necessarily incompatible with the purpose of liberal education at Dartmouth or with the responsibilities of an institution of higher learning in a democratic society."
2. "What is needed is a system whereby the military services can recruit for the ROTC on the college campus."
3. "defense" (a word used repeatedly)
4. "without making judgements about current military policies...."
5. "dependable supply of competent officers"

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6. "Educational institution --- (must) --- recognize and respond to current needs of our society..."
 7. "....such participation conforms to the public service function which is recognized as a basic purpose of American higher education."

Do we really believe these reasons? I mean, are those who set them down content to keep a military training program on these grounds? Actually, I suggest they propose some retention of ROTC because they (like all normal men) are unwilling to look the military, as it now stands, in the face. To get rid of ROTC would be to say that something known to us to be life-destroying is life-destroying.

The world stands on the brink of the abyss: Chinese explode hydrogen bombs, Russians march into Prague, Americans napalm Vietnamese, police murder blacks in the Algiers Hotel, blacks assassinate each other in Roxbury, Krushchev installs missiles in Cuba, and Kennedy prepares to strike back. Friends and colleagues! Do we want to add a scintilla of violence to this already hair-raising scene?

What does the Army demand of our young men, our friends, our students? The Air Force ROTC manual, "Fundamentals of Aerospace Weapons Systems" singles out for them their ultimate target:

"a military target is any person, thing, idea, entity, or location selected for destruction, inactivation, or rendering non-usable with weapons which will reduce or destroy the will or ability of the enemy to resist."

These targets are not the "steel and concrete" which President Johnson insists we "bomb with surgical precision". They are those ultimate entities

to which we, as scholars, have dedicated ourselves: men and ideas.

Nor does the Army believe persuading young men to assault such targets to be an easy matter. General S.L.A. Marshall, in Men Against Fire (pp. 78-79) recognizes the problem:

"...A revealing light is thrown on this subject through the studies of Medical Corps psychiatrists of the combat fatigue cases in the European Theater. They found that fear of killing, rather than fear of being killed, was the most common cause of battle fatigue in the individual, and that fear of failure ran a strong second.

It is therefore reasonable to believe that the average and normally healthy individual --- the man who can endure the mental and physical stresses of combat --- still has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance toward killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility. Though it is improbable that he may ever analyze his own feelings so searchingly as to know what is stopping his own hand, his hand is nonetheless stopped. At the vital point, he becomes a conscientious objector, unknowing. That is something to the American credit. But it is likewise something which needs to be analyzed and understood if we are to prevail against it in the interests of battle efficiency."

This is what the Army wants of us: to assist in deforming, bending, and twisting young men until they are willing to commit acts unnatural to their inclinations and upbringing. Where then is "defense"? Where lie "the needs of our society"? How can we not "make judgements"?

The youth of America desperately need models. The undergraduates of Dartmouth look to us for example, even above learning. We are rational men, and I believe we are humane. Rather than offer our students (and ourselves) to that part of society which means only death, let us take the opportunity, which should be pleasant for us and a joy to our students, to reaffirm life.

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