

20th COLLEGE TRAINING DETACHMENT

MISSION

LINEAGE¹

20th College Training Detachment

STATIONS

Danville, KY

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS²

Center College of Kentucky

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As had been the case in World War I, when ground schools for air cadets had been established at selected colleges throughout the country, during World War II it became necessary to provide prospective pilots, bombardiers, and navigators extensive preflight instruction prior to their assignment to flying school. During the interval between the two wars, this preflight instruction had not been necessary. Because of the small size of the air force, high educational requirements could be set for the selection of cadets, and sufficient time was available for training at the flying schools. The rapid expansion of the Army Air Corps that began in 1939 presented the dual problem of time for training and a lowering of educational standards to meet the personnel needs of the Air Corps. The preflight school, a combination of flight training and classroom instruction, provided a solution to these two problems.

In 1943 an additional phase of pre-flying instruction was introduced: the air crew college training program. The program came into existence not so much to meet an educational need as to hold a backlog of air crew candidates. The AAF, beginning in 1942, had recruited cadets in excess of its needs, and to hold them in inactive enlisted reserve. By the end of 1942 93,000 men found themselves in this situation, many in limbo for six or seven months. Not only did this inaction discourage many of the recruits, but the large pool of idle manpower began to attract the attention of selective service boards. In response, the AAF proposed to the War Department that the men be called to active duty and given a period of college training to make up educational shortcomings. In January 1943 the Secretary of War ordered the recommendations put into effect.

On December 11, 1942, Centre received from the War Manpower Commission's Office of Emergency Management a request that a questionnaire designed to obtain information needed in connection with Government training programs be filled out. The questionnaire was mailed to all colleges and universities but made it clear that this did not imply that a contract would be offered to any particular institution. Because Centre had already completed a detailed survey of its facilities it was possible to quickly complete and return the questionnaire. On January 25, 1943, a Site Board, composed of military personnel and government officials, visited the College to inspect its facilities. The report of the Board stated that Centre "would be receptive to a student program and would be willing ... to enter into a contract with the United States Government to provide necessary housing, messing, recreational, and classroom facilities for approximately 450 students." The report further stated that "It is deemed advisable by the College representatives to turn over the entire Men's College at Centre to the Army and in turn their remaining male students would be taken care of in conjunction with the Women's College of Centre College."

On February 19, 1943, the College received from the Army Air Forces, Headquarters of the Material Command, a letter of intent which said that the institution had been selected for the training of approximately 450 trainees, the first 200 to arrive on or about the 1st of March. It went on to note that a committee would soon visit the College to study requirements for the training program, on the basis of which a formal contract would be prepared authorizing payment for services and facilities not to exceed \$94,500. The letter of intent was accepted by Acting President James H. Hewlett, who had been authorized by the Board of Trustees to

contract with the United States Government for a unit of students for pre-flight training under the Army Air Corps.

On February 18, 1943, Captain H.E. Robertson arrived on campus to take command of the detachment. Offices were provided on the second floor of Old Centre, which served as the headquarters for the detachment. On the night of February 28, 1943, the first group of 200 Aircrew students arrived from Miami Beach, and the unit was designated the 20th College Training Detachment.

A formal contract, dated April 1, 1943, was negotiated between the Government and Centre College. Under this contract the College agreed to furnish housing, messing, limited medical services, physical training, and academic instruction. The Government would be responsible for providing flight instruction and would have charge of all military training. The Government agreed to pay a certain sum for the use of the campus, for providing instruction, for medical services, for food, and for maintenance and operation.

On March 1, 1943, 250 more trainees arrived, and from then on a complete unit of 450 students was on campus for most of the time the detachment continued. After this initial period, students arrived in groups of ninety. The students were all enlisted men, and had five weeks of basic training prior to their arrival on campus. They remained at Centre for a period of five months, at the successful completion of which they were reassigned elsewhere for additional flight training. At first the Detachment was composed of men with previous military service, many being non-commissioned officers. Soon, the students became younger, with few having had previous service. While at Centre they received only 10 hours of actual flight training, which was given at Goodall Field (today's Stuart Powell Field near Junction City) under a separate contract between the Government and the airport. Classes, taught by college faculty, met on a regular schedule Monday through Friday. Over each period of five months, the students were given 80 hours of mathematics instruction, 180 hours of physics, 60 hours of history, 60 hours of geography, 60 hours of English, and 24 hours of Civil Air Regulations. In addition, elective courses in Navigation and Meteorology were offered. Instruction seldom proceeded in an orderly fashion. In addition to the regular nine hours per day of classes, the Army also required one hour per day of supervised study, one hour per day of physical training, and one hour per day of military drill. It was often a problem finding enough hours in the day for everything. Adding to the difficulties was the constant flow of men in and out of the Detachment.

The most controversial part of the instruction was the ten hours of flight training. Since the purpose of this flying was only familiarization, training was restricted to simple maneuvers in light aircraft. Army Air Force observers criticized the training as of little value, but it did provide a morale boost for men who had waited months to learn how to fly. Upon successfully graduating from Centre's detachment, students would then move on to other Army Air Corp training centers for additional pilot, bombardier, or navigation training.

As each group of 90 students finished the course informal graduating exercises were held a night or two before the students were to leave. Sometimes a week or ten days elapsed between the departure of one group and the arrival of another, but usually a complete unit of 450 students was on campus at all times.

In 1939 there were a little over 200 students at Centre. Finding enough room to house, feed, and instruct 450 Aircrew students was a problem. Buildings were temporarily remodeled, and every square inch of campus found a use. Breckinridge Hall, Wiseman Hall, the upper floor of McReynolds, the upper floor of Hillcrest, Craik House, the Phi Delta Theta fraternity house, and the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity house (Fry House) were used to house students; the regular College dining hall on the lower floor of McReynolds was changed to a cafeteria to feed the students; Old Main and Old Young Science Hall were used for class rooms; and the basement of Old Main was refitted to house a bookstore and recreation rooms. The Detachment also used the library, gymnasium, and athletic fields.

Although limited, the trainees did enjoy a social life. An orchestra of students presented musical programs, dances were held in the gymnasium with students from Kentucky College for Women invited, inter-group competition in sports were scheduled, and a lounge in the basement of Old Main was used on those nights when wives and dates were permitted to visit.

At its height in April 1943 over 60,000 men were in aircrew college training detachments at more than 150 institutions. By late 1943 the backlog of men on inactive status had been substantially reduced, and moves were made to end the college program. In January 1944 entrance of aircrew students into college was cut almost in half, and contracts with many institutions were terminated. The Secretary of War approved the final termination of the college program by July 1944.

On June 9, 1944, the Headquarters of Centre's 20th College Training Detachment received an order designating July 25, 1944, as the date the unit was to deactivate. On June 25, 1944, a final review was held, and the following day all flight training and academic instruction were discontinued. Two days later all remaining students were transferred to other Army bases. In all, close to 1,800 men passed through the program, fifty-one of whom would die during the war.