

# Nichols in uniform

by Jim Douglas

From the Academy days to the present, Nichols men (and more recently women) have served their country with honor and distinction. Some have paid the ultimate sacrifice. Here's a brief history, starting with World War II.

By 1943, Nichols had a number of students enrolled in the Army, Navy, and Army Air Forces Reserve Corps of the Armed Forces. Other programs in place before the war for students interested in military careers were a Quartermaster course and Civilian Pilot Training program.

These courses were endorsed by military authorities and were considered useful to men who were planning on entering the Army or Navy through selective service. During World War II, more than 300 students, alumni,

administrators (including President James L. Conrad), and faculty went to war. According to a special Nichols yearbook, published in 1946 and titled "The War Ledger," 227 students enlisted in the Army, 69 in the Navy, eight in the Marine Corps, six in the Coast Guard, and four in the American Field Service; 28.7 percent were enlisted men, 36.8 percent were non-commissioned officers, and 34.5 percent were commissioned officers. In fact, so many enlisted that Nichols had to cease operations between 1943 and 1946.

Following the war, Nichols benefited greatly from the influx of veterans who were now able to obtain a college education thanks to the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill. Indeed, as James L. Conrad, Jr. noted in his *Nichols: A College for the Hill*, more than half and



perhaps as many as 90 percent of the class entering in 1946 were war veterans. In 1948, the college dedicated a new dining hall, Alumni Memorial Hall (now the site of the Fels Student Center), to Nichols men and their colleagues who died or were killed in World War II. And to house the new wave of post-WWII students, a new residence hall, Daniels Hall (1954-2004), was built down the hill behind Budleigh Hall using government surplus material from WWII military barracks.

In 1950 Nichols Junior College established the first college-based unit of the Army Organized Reserve

Corps (ROTC) as the 3rd Battalion of the 376th Infantry Regiment of the 94th Infantry Division. By 1952, six companies of reservists were in place at Nichols. The program ended in 1963 but was then offered again to Nichols students in 1968 in conjunction with Worcester Polytechnic Institute. By the 1980s, it was again available on campus to Nichols students



along with military science courses.

During the Korean War, the student newspaper reported on the events; by 1951, *The Nichols Alumnus* was publishing news from recent graduates headed to Korea as well as service in other parts of the world.

Except in 1965 and the early 1970s (the first lottery drawing for the draft since 1942 occurred on Dec. 1, 1969), the student newspaper had little to say about the war in Vietnam. But by 1972, *The Alumnus News* was again printing news of former students receiving medals for distinguished service, only this time in Southeast Asia.

During the 1980s, Nichols had an ROTC office on campus, staffed by Roger



Carney (later dean of student services and then director of the Fischer Institute) and Frank LeBrec.

For a brief time, between 2004 and 2008, graduate and undergraduate degree programs were offered at military bases in the Northeast and as far south as the District of Columbia.

Nichols has been a longtime participant in the Post 9/11 GI Bill's "Yellow Ribbon Program," offering veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and their dependents scholarships

which the Department of Veterans Affairs matches up to the full cost of tuition and fees. Nichols has also earned the coveted "military friendly campus" designation two years in a row, making it one of the 15 percent of colleges, universities, and trade schools in the country that are doing the most to embrace America's military service members,

veterans, and spouses as students and ensure their success on campus.

