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World War II Air Force Cadets at Saint John's

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75 years ago this winter:

The Army Invaded Saint John’s

It was in the first week in March, 1943, that a troop train stopping at the little grey Collegeville station unloaded the first contingent of the 87th College Training Detachment at St. John’s.

Image published in the 1944 *Sagatagan*, p.65; this version is from the SJU Archives, O:...\Depts&Programs\ROTC\Army Air Force 1940s\Box1803f5_SJ Army Air Force Unit During WWII.jpg
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18471/rec/24
Text from p. 59,
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18468/rec/24
Sketch from 1944 *Sagatagan*, p.4
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18441/rec/24
With the advent of World War II normal academic life was interrupted. St. John’s joined in the war effort as a member of the college training program for aircrews of the Army Air Forces Training Command. From February of 1943 until July of 1944, 1,500 air forces personnel received training at Collegeville at the rate of 300 every four months.
This is a tribute to the men of the Army Air Corps at St. John’s who trained hard and studied long during the preliminary stages of their aviation training so that they might be a credit to themselves, to their country, their corps, and to Saint John’s. This 1944 SAGATAGAN gives recognition to the record of these men as future officers of the United States Army and as Christian gentlemen. We know they will “Carry on.”
1944 Sagatagan, p.4-5,
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18441/rec/24
Text by Martin Schirber, OSB, St. John’s Magazine, spring 1983, p.25
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/9004/rec/3
There were approximately 300 cadets in the contingent, nearly equally divided between those from California and those from Missouri, Kansas and Illinois.
... we were brought inside and after a night's rest and the great breakfast prepared by the German Franciscan nuns (a far cry from Army mess) we knew for sure we died and went to heaven. The food had to be the best I've ever had anywhere, although my mother always felt that I over-rated the Saint John's bread and the entire cuisine.

... On 23 March 1943, we arrived at Saint John's and three feet of snow greeted us; ...
Image from the 1944 *Sagatagan*, p. 61
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18469/rec/24
List from the SJU Archives: O:...\Digital Archives\Depts&Programs\Army Air Force\1801f2 StudentRegulations.pdf
1. Our haircuts had to be maintained; every 5 to 7 days one had a haircut. Cost: 25 cents. Time to implement the cut: about 5 minutes. A portly barber was moved in from Saint Cloud and set up in the basement of Benet Hall — virtually the only building then for non-religious to stay in; the Army had the whole building.
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19716/rec/2
List from the SJU Archives: O:\...\Digital Archives\Depts&Programs\Army Air Force\1801f2 StudentRegulations.pdf
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19716/rec/2
List from the SJU Archives: O:\...\Digital Archives\Depts&Programs\Army Air Force\1801f2 StudentRegulations.pdf
3. [In times for academic instruction]. . . we divided in ‘Flights’ of about 30 men and marched to classes in formation. We are at attention until the student officer in charge saluted the instructor and gave the command, ‘At Ease.’ This was difficult for some of the Fathers, to return the salute—some didn’t.
MARCHING—in review before Capt. Casey, Father Abbot, Lts. Mosiman, Green and Greenwood on the football field; the students found this an interesting substitute for the regular Saturday football games; when these pictures were taken another Flight "E" was about to leave.

Lower image and caption from 1944 *Sagatagan*, p.66  
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18472/rec/24  
Inset image from the SJU Archives, O:\...\Depts\Programs\ROTC\Army Air Force 1940s Box1803f5_Scan3.jpg  
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19693/rec/1
5. In our 300 cadet contingent, there was exceptional musical talent; many had played professionally before entry into the service. I played clarinet and sax, but had aspirations of becoming a concert violinist—before I decided to eat regularly. Saint John’s music department provided most of the instruments for us.
1944 Sagatagan, p.72,
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18474/rec/24
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/19716/rec/2
9. The cleanliness and hygiene of this period has probably never been surpassed at Saint John’s. Our rooms were inspected daily, beds made tight enough to bounce a quarter. Shoes, lined up and shined, clothes hung one inch apart, floor spotless. Latrines were immaculate, too; white glove inspection every Saturday. Yes, tops of doors and even the drains in the wash basins were wiped with the white glove—the Army had a way of making you wish they remained white. Like the Brothers and Fathers of the abbey, our lives were very structured.
This was no snap course the Air Corps was giving its future pilots; English, history, geography, mathematics, physics, and first aid were all on the day's slate—courses that had to be covered and covered fast, a year's work in two to five months' time.

Image & caption from 1944 Sagatagan, p.61
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18469/rec/24
Text from p. 59-60
Image & caption from 1944 *Sagatagan*, p.61

http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18469/rec/24

Schedule from the SJU Archives: O:\...\Digital Archives\Depts&Programs\Army Air Force\1772f8 AviationStudentSchedules.pdf
However, classes only consumed party of the day; George Durenberger and Joe Benda, besides teaching first aid, had to see that cadets were put through a few stiff periods of Physical Training. During the summer the fledglings ran the obstacle course set up on the Johnny gridiron; in winter PT was held in the gym, or outside on skates and skis.

PHYSICAL TRAINING—or “PT” as it was called, may not have been the aviation students’ idea of a good time, but there is no doubt that Durenberger and Benda and Luckemeyer did not let up until their men had reached the physical fitness that won such high praise later.

Photo and caption from 1944 *Sagatagan*, p.70-71
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18474/rec/24
Upper text from p. 60.
SJU Archives Ascheman (sesquicentennial) collection, LP128.1936.StadiumEnt.jpg.
Up and down the roads around the buildings, student officers led squads to the lusty singing of “I’ve Been Workin’ on the Railroad,” and “The Air Corps Song.” It was hard work, this learning to be a pilot, but with the goal kept in mind time seemed to fly. Taps sounded at 22:00, and the old double bunks looked good.
In February, 1944, the news was made official that Army Air Corps College Detachments in Minnesota would be discontinued. The announcement found the 87th CTD with a record of twelve squadrons graduated and four more to go. It was a record of work well done; in little more than a year almost a thousand men had been prepared for their parts as U. S. airmen. St. John’s University had contributed well to the war effort, and for everyone connected with the Detachment or University there were fine memories of a full and exciting year.