



Lewis Webb's recollections about the war-training program

In his first interview (Nov. 4, 1974), when asked about night classes in the area in the 1930s, Webb's response included the following:

Webb: The evening college flourished until the War started, and then it was obvious that we were losing students both in the daytime and in the evening. And in order to keep the faculty busy, we started a war-training program. It was called an engineering defense training program to start with. In fact, the first courses that were taught on a vocational level were taught in the physics department. They were a series of two courses called aircraft instruments, in which students that were working at the Naval Operating Base--the Naval Air Station--would come in and learn how the various aircraft instruments functioned. They would learn to repair them, to make repairs on them. And this was the first vocational course. It was also theory taught; not just the vocational aspects of repairing but the theory behind it was included. And, as the War got closer, the federal education department--department of education--set up EDT, which was engineering defense training. These were courses conducted by schools of engineering. We qualified because we were part of VPI. So we started these EDT programs. And such things as aircraft mechanics, aircraft welding, topographic mapping, various things that were all related to engineering. Now, this gave faculty that were qualified to teach those courses a chance to continue working. A little later they would change it to ESMDT, which was engineering science management training program; and when management came in we could offer things in accounting for workers that were working at the base and in the yard and places, to take defense jobs in management. And that enabled us to hold onto some more of our faculty--to give them some load. And from that, it developed into the engineering science management war training after the War started. This area, this program that we had, was the largest area on the east coast--the greatest number of students along the east coast--taking these programs. We had several thousand when it was in the peak. But the main purpose was to keep your faculty busy and also to serve the defense and war needs of the community. (p. 11)

Sweeney: You've already answered, in part, the next question in respect to the war effort. I was wondering if you played any specific role in the organization of the defense courses and if you, at any time, feared that the college would have to close for the duration of the war?

Webb: *Very definitely we would have... it would have been necessary to close unless we got more students--and the war program was put in for that purpose, as I told you. We started with the aircraft instruments, and that developed into many, many things. Electroplating, all types of diesel engineering, in fact, we had courses in actually teaching students to fly, and I taught a course in meteorology to help them with the weather part of their program, and all of this was done to keep this institution intact.. .going, until the students came back. My part in the program was the beginning of the program with the aircraft entrance course, which started in 1938 and finally developed into the war training program. Since I was not head of the institution, at that time Mr. Harrington was. He was head at the beginning of the war training program. But in 1940 he went into the Navy, and the war training program was given to me to direct from that point on. And... that led, I guess, ultimately to my getting into administration and why William and Mary let me pick up their part of the administration is a question that will probably bear some research. (p. 13)*

Full Nov. 4, 1974 interview:

<http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/oralhistory/id/644>

In a second interview (Nov. 11, 1974), Dr. Sweeney asks for more information about the program and women's roles.

Webb: *The first program was called EDT, Engineering Defense Training, and then it went into ESMDT, Engineering Science Management Defense Training, and finally, of course, the war came and they changed the "D" to a "W" and made it ESMWT; I've forgotten, it's been so long, but the initials were strictly for Engineering Science Management War Training Program. The attempt to get more of the women to take part in the activities of the Naval Operating Base and the Naval Air Station and the Norfolk Naval Shipyard and other defense industries was made very strongly, and we did have a number of women that took courses, even such courses as welding— aircraft welding, aircraft instruments, many in drafting and photographic mapping... oh, management courses, of course, many of those went into the safety engineering, and courses of that type. (pg.2)*

Full Nov. 11, 1974 interview:

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