

Stop ROTC

Military On Campus?

Lenny Siegel

Will the Reserve Officers Training Corps make a comeback at Stanford? Who cares?

There is clearly no groundswell for ROTC at Stanford. I could get more students to sign a petition that Hoover tower be clothed.

But ROTC is not a dead issue. The Pentagon wants it back. The New York Times reported (Oct. 25, 1973), "ROTC Officers concede that the colleges they have lost — Harvard, Stanford, and Columbia, among others — are the ones they would most like to have, both for their symbolic value and for the quality of their students."

It is easy to see why the Pentagon wants to enlist such prestigious universities. It may help stem the tide of anti-military sentiment in the U.S.

Qualifications

But why are Stanford students so qualified for military leadership? Is it because they will humanize the military?

Hardly. In the later years of the Indochina War, servicemen of all ranks and background were refusing to fight. A few were officers. Some were probably from upper class universities. But the bulk were not.

Besides, the men who issued the orders to bomb cities, farms, and villages throughout Indochina were not "redneck" drill instructors. They included sophisticates such as Harvard's Henry Kissinger. And young Stanford graduates like Don Segretti are not likely to improve our government's record.

Technical Personnel

No. The military wants Stanford students because Stanford produces more qualified technical and scientific personnel. Despite all the talk about a volunteer army, the major thrust of direct U.S. military activity is automation. To maintain and operate the electronic battlefield and unmanned aircraft, the military needs technically competent officers. Schools like Stanford, with strong science and engineering curricula, play a major role.

But is ROTC all that important now? How about the cease-fire?

The withdrawal of American ground troops from Indochina was a victory for the anti-war movement, but the fighting continues with massive U.S. aid. Furthermore, around the world the U.S. military still maintains an apparatus capable of intervening to serve "American interests." Short of intervention, the U.S. trains military leaders from some 65 countries and maintains advisory teams in more than 40. ROTC helps keep this military machine functioning.

Part of the Mood

It is difficult to imagine a new, large-scale American intervention overseas at present. The mood of the country, it seems, will not permit it. But we are a part of that mood, and if the campuses "return to the 1950s," one important obstacle to American aggression will be gone.

At the end of finals week 35 people protested ROTC outside the academic senate. We'll be back at the business school, with more people, today at 3 p.m. (Lenny Siegel is coordinator of the Pacific Studies Center.)