



Opinion

I'm an Army general. My education shouldn't be unexpected.

Elite universities and the military should be friends, not foes.

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By Monty Montague

Monty Montague is a brigadier general in the U.S. Army.

When I graduated from Harvard in 1995, many of my classmates expressed surprise that I was joining the Army. Early in my career as an officer — which has now spanned 31 years — friends and family often asked when I was going to get out of the Army and put my Ivy League degree to use.

They would have been astonished to hear that a battalion commander once said that he couldn't believe I went to Harvard instead of West Point. I love the Army, but this kind of attitude is common. When a senior officer made a good-natured dig about my intelligence, I quipped that I must not be that smart, because I chose one of the only career fields in which my Ivy League education was a disadvantage.

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Americans — both soldiers and civilians — simply do not connect elite education with military service. It is equally concerning that the two domains are connecting less and less with each other.

Academia and national security represent two fundamental pillars of American life. The first represents hope; the second, safety. You cannot have hope without safety, and safety without hope is not worth much.

The most senior institutions of each pillar, Harvard and the Army, are older than the nation itself. In 1789, George Washington, six months into his presidency, captured the connection in a thank-you letter to Harvard leadership. He wrote that the flourishing of the university and its students was “among the most pleasing of my wishes and expectations.”

Washington’s last word is the most important: expectations. Study in tranquility, follow your passions, but the nation expects much of you afterward — because of the quality of your education. Throughout its history, the United States has built a two-way street between its best schools and the military, to the benefit of the institutions themselves and to the country.

Take as an example the two entities that are closest to my heart: Harvard and the Army. Tens of thousands of Harvard alumni have served the nation, through every conflict in its history. Washington took command of the Continental Army near Harvard Yard in 1775 and housed troops on campus. The nation’s first Reserve Officers’ Training Corps unit was formed at Harvard in 1916. Twenty-one Harvard alumni have been awarded the Medal of Honor, including the late Theodore

have been awarded the Medal of Honor, including the late Theodore Roosevelt, his son Theodore Jr., seven generals who fought in the Civil War, two medical doctors, and a Marine lieutenant and Army staff sergeant who threw themselves onto grenades to save their fellow servicemen. Harvard's Memorial Church was dedicated in 1932 to the university's World War I dead. The university has since added memorials to World War II, Korea, Vietnam and its Medal of Honor winners. I was commissioned on the steps of the church, with 18 fellow lieutenants and ensigns.



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The benefits are easy to see, for both sides. For instance, some late-career officers forgo service war colleges to attend prestigious national security and international relations graduate programs, such as at Princeton University or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The officers, who may not have had their opinions challenged in a dozen years, can learn to better articulate their positions to classmates who might not understand or agree with them, while civilian students can grow to respect officers' intellect, not just their service. Many of these officers will reach the highest ranks of the service, while their civilian counterparts may find themselves in boardrooms, courtrooms or legislative bodies. All leave campus with a diverse and talented set of contacts — a two-way street indeed.

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But the pavement is crumbling. Beginning in the fall, the services are pulling their students from these graduate programs out of fear of indoctrination and the undermining of American values — as if those bright, brave patriots need protection. The move is touted as a transition to more “rigorous and relevant” schools, but it only drives the wedge deeper.

Top universities have helped to widen the divide, too. Many ought to do more to seek out undergraduates with a propensity for service or who already have been awarded ROTC scholarships. With a minuscule military presence, colleges are sending a generation into the upper echelons of society with a limited understanding of the machine of national security and with no one to ask.

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When I was a student in the '90s, the Vietnam hangover and opposition to military policy on gay service members created a frigid relationship between the services and top-tier universities. Students and administrators who did not want cadets on campus were, oddly enough, aligned with senior officers who saw Ivy League degrees as an unnecessary expense. The cadets were the ones who suffered, with limited support from both sides.

In 1889 William Butler, an author and British soldier, wrote: “The nation that will insist upon drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking by cowards.” Americans should not want their nation to embody Butler’s words. But the fight between universities and the military is bringing the country perilously close.

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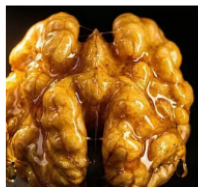
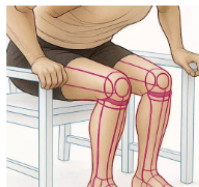
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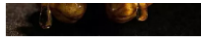
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