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.
Colman Barry writes in *Worship & Work, p. 294*:

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.

Colman Barry, *Worship & Work, p. 294*:
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/11244
The Record

Army Will Use Campus Facilities

1944 Sagatagan, p.7

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.”

St. John’s university has been placed on a list of educational institutions to be used for specialized military training, according to an announcement made last Saturday by a joint committee of the war department, navy department and war manpower commission.

The authorities at St. John’s have already expressed their willingness to accept the government offer. Although no formal contract has yet been signed, the present arrangements call for one contingent of 150 air cadets to move into St. John’s March 1, with a second group of 150 coming April 1.

In accepting the offer of the armed forces, St. John’s emphasizes the fact that all present courses will be continued including those in liberal arts. It is planned that the first group of cadets will move into the upper floors of St. Bonet’s hall and that the regular students now occupying those rooms will move over to St. Gregory’s hall.

p. 1 of the February 11, 1943 issue of The Record;
1944 Sagatagan, p.7
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/18442/rec/24
Since the college enrollment had fallen from over 500 to about 130 because of the draft, this remnant — 17-year-olds, pre-divinity students, and students deferred because of physical disability — could be accommodated in the dorms and study halls, and the cadets took over Benet Hall, the only dorm on campus with rooms for college students.
There were approximately 300 cadets in the contingent, nearly equally divided between those from California and those from Missouri, Kansas and Illinois.

A “Flight” of student Air Corps cadets marching to classes from their Saint Benet Hall dormitory in the early 1940s program. University Archives Photo.
... 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.

Anthony Bommarito, Abbey Quarterly, Winter 1990 p.8

...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/SJUA Archives/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.
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Class Schedule</th>
<th>Class D</th>
<th>Flight 1</th>
<th>Aviation Studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0800-0850</td>
<td>Physics N 33</td>
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<tr>
<td>0900-0950</td>
<td>English R 41</td>
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<td>Physical Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>1400-1450</td>
<td>History A 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Days of the Week:
- **Monday**
  - Physics N 33
  - English R 41
  - Math A 11
  - History A 11
- **Tuesday**
  - Physics N 33
  - English R 41
  - Math A 11
  - History A 11
- **Wednesday**
  - Sociology A 11
  - English R 41
  - Math A 11
  - History A 11
- **Thursday**
  - Physics N 33
  - Sociology A 11
  - Math A 11
  - History A 11
- **Friday**
  - Physics N 33
  - English R 41
  - Math A 11
  - History A 11
- **Saturday**

Aviation Students marching to and from classes in the Science Hall, where the Physics classes reside.

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.
SJU Archives Ascheman (sesquicentennial) collection, LP128.1936.StadiumEnt.jpg.
From the SJU Archives, Depts&Programs\ROTC\Army Air Force Army Air Force 1940s Box1803f5_Scan1.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.