

Harvard University's Vietnam War-era hostility to the military is largely history. Ask the small contingent of Marines who are going to graduate school there—and thriving.

# THE FEW. THE PROUD. THE (HARVARD???) MARINES

By Art Pine

**M**arine Captain Maura Sullivan wasn't sure what to expect when she was invited to introduce herself as a prospective graduate student during a visit to a Harvard University classroom a few months ago.

Since the late 1960s, the elite Ivy League school had been known as a hotbed of hostility toward the military, and Sullivan had just spent five years as a Marine officer, including a six-month deployment in Iraq. Asked to tell the students what she had been doing over the previous few months, she briefly recounted her stint in the Corps—and her tour in Fallujah—and waited nervously for the reaction.

To her surprise, "The entire class of 90 students stood up and applauded," Sullivan says. "I was so humbled by that, I walked around and thought, this is the place I have to go to school." Now 27, in the Marine Corps Reserve, and enrolled in a dual-degree program at the Harvard Business School and the Kennedy School of Government, she'll graduate in 2009 with master's degrees in business and in public policy.

Sullivan's experience, similar to those of other recent veterans who have enrolled at Harvard, illustrates a little-

publicized development here: times have changed at the Ivy League's old gray eminence, and both active-duty military personnel and recent veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are fitting in just about as comfortably as they would at any other major American university.

During the height of the Vietnam War, Harvard became a center of the student protest movement. Anti-war demonstrations were routine then. Angry students derided almost anyone in uniform. In 1969, the faculty voted to kick the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program off the campus. From 1979 through 2002—and then again from 2004 to mid-2005—Harvard Law School barred military recruiters from its hallways, most recently to protest the Defense Department's "don't-ask-don't-tell" policy on gays.

To be sure, Harvard still is a long way from becoming a military academy. Would-be officers





still must take their military or naval science classes at neighboring Massachusetts Institute of Technology. And the law school relented on its policy toward recruiters only after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last year that would have enabled the government to cut off all federal aid to Harvard if it did not let the recruiters back in.

Even so, Harvard's legendary hostility toward the military is largely history. Student protests against the military are almost nonexistent. Last February, the Kennedy School of Government, the Harvard Business School, and the Harvard Law School co-sponsored an interservice appreciation banquet for students who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan. The business school is now the site for the annual Marine Corps birthday ball in November.

And while ROTC still is banned from the Harvard campus, former university president Lawrence H. Summers almost succeeded in getting it reinstated last year. In all, more than 100 active-duty servicemembers and veterans are enrolled as graduate students. Harvard undergraduates freely sign up for various officer-training programs at MIT. And almost all describe their professors and classmates as respectful and supportive.

"There was a lot of anger and hostility then," but it has pretty much gone away, says Kennedy School history professor Ernest R. May, a Harvard dean during the Vietnam-era protests and a frequent adviser to Washington policymakers who has watched the university's relationship with the military closely over the years.

### The Most Cohesive Group

Not surprisingly, the most cohesive military-related group at Harvard is the Marines—some two dozen who, like Captain Sullivan, have either recently left active duty or are back in graduate school under military scholarships.

Besides gathering for the birthday ball each November, the group keeps in touch via an e-mail newsletter and meets monthly to hear guest speakers, plan activities, or socialize. It mentors NROTC students, helps recruiters, and supports charities.

And four NROTC students from Harvard have joined those attending MIT and Boston University in the Semper Fidelis Society, an informal group whose members—mostly midshipmen who have applied to become Marine officers—muster before sunrise three times a week for physical training, clad in olive-and-gold T-shirts and shorts, embossed with the Marine Corps eagle-globe-and-anchor, with reflector-equipped belts to ward off wee-hours auto traffic. They also meet to hear guest speakers. And they raise money to benefit Marine families.

"They're just awesome," says Major John F. Griffin, the Marine Corps instructor at the MIT-BU NROTC unit, watching the Semper Fidelis Society members finishing up their crack-of-dawn physical training exercises at BU's Nickerson Field stadium. "I just can't wait to get back in the Fleet to see these young men and women as lieutenants. They're smart, they're fit and they're already very dedicated. It's an honor to work with them."

The Harvard Marines themselves aren't exactly your typical college kids. Captain Rye Barcott, 28, an M.B.A. candidate who served as a Marine officer in Iraq and Afghanistan and is now in the Marine Corps Reserve, heads a \$250,000-a-year nonprofit group, Carolina for Kibera, that provides medical care for residents of Kibera, a slum in Nairobi, Kenya, and organizes recreational activities for youngsters there.

Barcott started the foundation as an undergraduate after spending time in Nairobi on a Marine Corps-approved project trying to learn more about how ethnic strife begins—a prelude to learning how to deal with it on deployments—and expanded it during his off-duty hours and vacation time while serving in Iraq. This year the organi-

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zation will ally with the University of North Carolina—Barcott's alma mater—with a hoped-for budget of \$4 million.

Former Captain Nathaniel Fick, 30, an infantry officer, wrote a book called *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* about his experiences at Quantico and about the challenges he faced as a junior officer in an elite Marine recon unit deployed in Iraq. The 369-page volume made the *New York Times* best-seller list and was chosen as a best book of the year by the *Washington Post*. He's now in a dual-degree program at the Kennedy School and the business school.

Marine Corps Reserve Captain Tyson Belanger, 32, is starting the second year of a doctoral program in political science. He hopes to draw on his three tours in Iraq and experience as a coordinator between the Marines and Iraqi security forces to focus his dissertation on how the military can work with local leaders in a country such as Iraq to spur cooperation and bring an end to the fighting.

"It's not just to win battles, but to win wars," Belanger says. "That's consistent with our ethos—with the 1st Marine Division's ethos."

### A Definite Plus

To the Marines at Harvard, having been in the Corps is a definite plus, says former Captain Geoff Orazem, 29, a Marine platoon commander in Iraq who later transferred to the Air Force for special operations. "You already have many of the habits that it takes to be a good student—showing up at class on time, doing your work, and doing it well," he says. "The sort of self-discipline and motivation the Corps taught is very useful here."

But the Marines say they also have acquired an exposure to life and a level of experience that young people who have spent those years in school don't have.

"On several occasions, I've recounted how experiences I've had in the military apply to business problems," says Carroll Lane, a 31-year-old former CH-53 helicopter pilot who served in the Western Pacific before resigning his commission as a captain in 2005.

"When I was in my mid-20s, I was an aircraft commander, with four crew members and 24 Marines under my command," Lane says. "That's not something that most of my classmates have done. And I'm able to share what I've learned and, in turn, to learn from them. It's the mixture of backgrounds that makes Harvard so special."



**THE GREENING OF HARVARD** Marine Green, that is. Among those who deployed to Iraq as Marines and now are graduate students at the elite Ivy League school are (kneeling in front, left to right) Tyson Belanger, Carroll Lane, and Nathaniel Fick; and (standing, behind them) Rye Barcott and Maura Sullivan. The statue is of the university's founder, John Harvard.

Nate Fick, of the B-school and the Kennedy School, agrees. “When somebody is talking about leading his three-member team on a consulting project, that doesn’t seem in the same ballpark in terms of ethical dilemmas or leadership challenges as leading a platoon at age 23 or 24,” he says. “In a platoon or company, you’re making life-or-death decisions every day. Having felt the weight of that kind of responsibility tempers your judgment in decision-making.”

Faculty members, too, notice the difference. Amy C. Edmondson, professor of leadership and management at the Harvard Business School, says Marine veterans (and those of other services, too) are usually better prepared and more articulate than those with civilian backgrounds, and better able to exhibit leadership in class.

“I’m fairly confident that if I call on a person with a military background cold, he or she will be able to get a discussion started,” she says. “The military veterans are terrific to have in class.”

## Policymakers, Not the Troops

Admittedly, most of the reason the hostility at Harvard has faded is that there no longer is a draft, and today’s students aren’t likely to have to go to Iraq or Afghanistan, the Kennedy School’s Professor May points out. At the same time, Professor May and others say, today’s students have learned to differentiate: the military is there because the civilian government ordered it to go, and they can’t blame the troops for that.

“It’s no secret that there are a lot of people at the Kennedy School of Government who are opposed [to the U.S. presence in Iraq],” Captain Sullivan says. “But their attitude is, ‘I’m very opposed to the war, but I respect and admire you for serving.’ People draw a distinction between the architects of that policy and those who are carrying it out.”

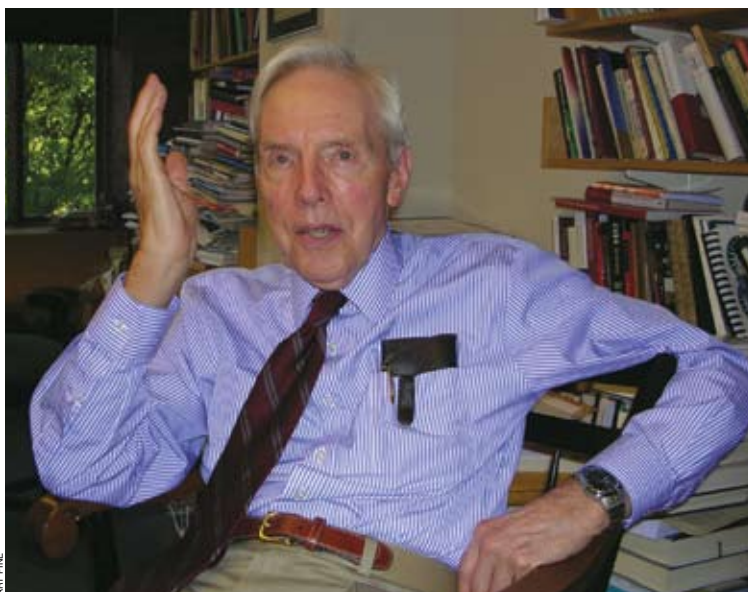
Indeed, with the military now composed entirely of volunteers—and no large-scale wars over the past two decades in which a father or an uncle has served—today’s undergraduates are so divorced from any contact with servicemembers that they’re more curious than anything, says former platoon commander Geoff Orazem.

“When they find out that I went to Iraq, they’re really surprised,” Orazem says. “They haven’t thought about the military, and they don’t really know anybody who was in it. They don’t know what to make of it.” Nate Fick has had similar experiences; “Many times, people have come up and shaken my hand and said I’m the first person they’ve met who actually was there in Iraq.”

With that in mind, Harvard’s Marines—and many other recent veterans as well—say they feel a special obligation to try to bridge the civilian-military divide.

“I’m the only Marine in my [class] section, and I take very seriously my obligation that I may be the only Marine people meet,” Captain Sullivan says.

“I think that any chance that Harvard University has to see a Marine officer in uniform on campus is a tremendous opportunity,” says Lane. “We hold the Marine Corps ball for ourselves, but at the same time we hold



**THINGS HAVE CHANGED** As Harvard dean during the Vietnam War era, the distinguished historian Professor Ernest R. May remembers well the anti-military fervor that engulfed the university back then. Now, though, much of that sentiment no longer exists, he says.

it to introduce our classmates to the Marine Corps. The entire Harvard Business School is invited. Most of them have never met U.S. Marines and it surprises them to see that they’re classmates.”

Harvard’s undergraduates are as much a part of the group as the combat veterans—and as much at home at Harvard, even wearing their uniforms for NROTC events at MIT.

“I expected to see a lot of hostility, but most of the students are either curious or indifferent,” says Midshipman Shawna Lee Sinnott, 19, a sophomore in Arts and Sciences. “For a lot of students, it’s the first time they’ve had any contact with anyone in uniform, and they think it’s really cool. Most people understand now that they can put politics aside even if they don’t agree with what you’re doing.”

The Marines’ cohesiveness, seemingly present anywhere there are two or more Leathernecks in the same room, has been intensified by their combat experience.

“In some ways, it’s therapeutic to talk with each other,” Barcott says. “The environment at Harvard is so vastly different and the responsibilities we have here pale in comparison to what we had in Marine combat. The bond is very strong. It crosses academic boundaries.”

The all-services appreciation banquet sponsored by the three graduate schools last February was the brainchild of David R. Gergen, a White House adviser to four Presi-



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**GETTING IN SHAPE** Members of the Boston-area Semper Fidelis Society chapter, comprising midshipmen in Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps programs from Harvard, Boston University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and who plan to become Marines, perform leg-lifts during an early morning workout at Nickerson Field at BU. Harvard expelled its NROTC unit in 1969 as a protest against the Vietnam War.

exactly a détente. Summers, a former Secretary of the Treasury, made a point of attending the commissioning ceremonies of Harvard students who had completed ROTC at BU and MIT during his 2001 through 2006 term in office. The student year-book now lists ROTC activities. And Harvard puts ROTC scholarships on its website for financial aid, even though students, as previously noted, must take their military science and naval science classes at MIT.

Summers' attempt to reinstate the program at Harvard collapsed when he resigned in the face of faculty pressure about several grievances last year. Although his final spat with the Arts and Science faculty was triggered by remarks he made about women's advancement in science, his bid to re-

activate Harvard's ROTC program ended up being "one of the grievances about him," Professor May says, adding: "There are a lot of relics of the 1970s on the faculty of Arts and Sciences."

Meanwhile, Maura Sullivan says, the road between Harvard and the military is a two-way street. "Two of my very close friends graduated from the Kennedy School last year, and now they're both back in Iraq," she says. "It's a unique, close-knit community."

Summers, now director of the Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership, and Don Dixon, a former naval officer who is now a venture capitalist in Palo Alto, California. The two hatched the idea during a chance encounter at the University of North Carolina, and the Kennedy School provided the facilities.

The dinner was preceded by an afternoon-long seminar on leadership in combat that included Army Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, then director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, now President Bush's war czar. Some 250 persons attended the banquet.

Meanwhile, Harvard seems to be moving—slowly—toward a peaceful co-existence with the military, if not

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