In the Army now

STAFF EDITORIAL

The U.S. Army's Special Operations Command trains elite soldiers in the Green Berets, Rangers and other units that specialize in behind-enemy-lines combat.

Now, in agreement with the University of North Carolina system, those soldiers will have access to additional education at UNC campuses, particularly in the area of languages including Arabic, Pashtu, Urdu and others specific to the Middle East. That's an obvious benefit in these times, when the gathering of intelligence and simply dealing with citizens in the Middle East is all important.

The soldiers also will have available training in the medical field and technology. While some of this has been going on, formalizing the connections and making such training more accessible to these special troops is important. It should be a productive relationship, and the Army will be funding the effort.

There ought to be a benefit as well for regular students who'll be exposed to the experiences of these soldiers. Professors also will benefit, because Special Operations soldiers have real-life experience that can be shared.

This was true during and after the World Wars, Korean and Vietnam, when soldier students added a new dimension to lectures and discussions, not just of war but of foreign cultures.

UNC system President Erskine Bowles had it right, then, when he described the agreement as an "opportunity" for the university.

For the Army, it's a chance to take soldiers to a new level when it comes to understanding the nuances of languages. That's all-important in troubled regions where American troops need to be as familiar as possible with war-torn cultures, and to understand the ways and means of terrorism. A university with broad expertise and resouces can help.

"Win-win" is an overused phrase. In this case, however, it really does apply.