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MILITARY SCIENCE

By Captain Michael F. O'Dwyer
The military heritage of the University of North Dakota has roots extending back into its earliest days. In this, the centennial year, UND can proudly claim to have had military training on the campus for eighty-two of those years. Except for one period of inactivity following the Spanish-American War, the military presence on campus has been continuous since the first student company was organized in 1888.

The establishment of any new program has its associated complications and the military training program was no exception. In the fall of 1888, when military training was first accepted as a course of instruction at the University, the first obstacle presented itself to the administration—where could they acquire weapons so that drill could be conducted? In short order, the budding military organization had its weapons as Governor Church loaned thirty-eight muskets for drill in December of that year.

Participation in the program was required for all male students unless they were specifically excused by the faculty. To guarantee the success of this "new program" on campus, the drill was conducted under the supervision of President Sprague, a former Colonel in the Union Army.

The State Legislature of North Dakota recognized the existence of military training at the University in March of 1890 by passing legislation providing for its acknowledgement and continuation. Active responsibility for the conduct of military training was assumed by the War Department in the fall of 1890 when Second Lieutenant Leon S. Roudiez was detailed Officer in Charge. "A uniform of 'Baldwin Gray' was adopted, and in June, 1891, 'Springfield Cadet' rifles and the proper accoutrements were obtained. Roudiez was given full faculty status as Professor of Military Science and Tactics and also taught classes in French. The military department was popular. Students liked the uniforms so well that they frequently wore them home for the holidays, and there was talk for a time of making the cadet uniform the official daily dress at the University."(1)

Military training continued under the direction of the Regular Army until the winter of 1898 when all military personnel were withdrawn in order to participate in the Spanish-American War. Training on campus was carried on by civilian instructors until the program was discontinued in 1904. "It was partly owing to the emphasis on athletics that the military department was closed in 1904. After the Spanish-American War, when the resident officer was called to active duty, the War Department refused to detail any more officers to the campus, despite repeated requests from (President) Merrifield. As time went on, whatever enthusiasm there had been dwindled away in the absence of any war threat, Indian or foreign, and under the indifferent drilling of student instructors. Military training received hardly another thought until the European War and then only after the preparedness movement was well advanced."(2)
After the entry of the United States in World War I, military training was resumed on campus. The United States government had made plans to mobilize the universities across the nation to support the war effort. In May, 1918 an eight week vocational training program was established. "The first class of trainees arrived in July and were quartered in the gymnasium, which promptly became a 'barracks'. . . . In late August plans for a national Student Army Training Corps (SATC) were finally completed. Following a conference of college and army representatives at Ft. Sheridan. . . . hasty preparations were made to receive the first contingent of four hundred student soldiers who were to arrive in September. The vocational corps, expanded to two hundred, was also continued, which meant that the University campus was in the process of becoming an army camp when term opened on October 1; quite properly the opening ceremonies were of an entirely military nature."(3) However, the newly formed SATC was unable to accomplish its mission of training because of the outbreak of the great Spanish Influenza epidemic on campus early in October, 1918. The epidemic, which caused a suspension of classes and brought about the imposition of a general quarantine on campus, continued with unaltered violence until the first part of November. The plague claimed 29 student deaths in the military detachments.

With the conclusion of the war, the SATC was dissolved. One of the benefits reaped by the university during the period of time that the SATC was on the campus was the building of the Armory. The facility was constructed with funds allocated to the university by the War Department. But it was not long before a military training program was reinstated on the campus. In January of 1919 a telegram was sent to President Thomas Kane from the Committee on Education and Special Training (Meras) in Washington D.C. stating "You may proceed with organization of R.O.T.C. pending official notification from the Adjutant General of the Army." This telegram marked the true beginning of the present ROTC program. On April 15, 1919, a unit of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps was officially established at the University of North Dakota. "It was only with much reluctance that the Faculty Council finally voted to establish the ROTC; indeed the measure was watered down with a proviso that students requiring time for other duties would be excused by the Administrative Committee."(4)

During the period between the World Wars, the ROTC was an integral part of campus life. The University marching band was provided by the ROTC. "The Scabbard and Blade" was a student organization for ROTC cadets. And the annual Military Ball was a major social event at the University.

Up until 1937 military training at the University of North Dakota was compulsory for all male students. "... the state legislature, reflecting the neutralism aroused by the munitions investigation of North Dakota's Senator Gerald P. Nye, abolished compulsory ROTC at the University and the Agricultural College. . . ."(5)

World War II saw the establishment of new military activities on campus. "The war training program began in 1942. Between June and November the University provided classroom facilities, ground school instruction, and housing and board for a total of nine hundred Army Air Corps glider pilots. . . . A Signal Corps prescience course in radio also began in July. . . . Early in 1943 the Army Air Corps moved in with the establishment of the 304th College Training Detachment with a complement of 750. An Army specialized training
program in engineering, also begun in 1943, and a preprofessional training program trained another 550 servicemen. There were in addition a small Army and Navy medical training group. . . . and a branch of the United States Student Cadet Nurse Corps."(6)

Following World War II, the Military Science Department resumed operation of an Army ROTC unit. With the separation of the Army and the Army Air Corps in 1946, the Campus unit was divided into an Army and an Air Force unit. The Air Force ROTC was discontinued in 1978 because of reduced enrollment.

The Army ROTC program was once again made compulsory for all male students after World War II. In the 1953-54 school year the Army ROTC program was changed from an Infantry to a General Military Science curriculum. The change gave students broad training to prepare them to serve in any one of fourteen branches of the Army which were then open to selection by Military Science graduates. There have been periodic changes in the curriculum since then to offer more academic subjects and delete purely military subjects which could be better taught at off-campus training sessions.

In October, 1964 the ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964 became law. This legislation greatly strengthened ROTC, increased the programs offered and provided other opportunities and benefits for both the University and the ROTC students.

Up to the fall of 1965, all able-bodied male students at UND were required by the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education to take the Basic Course (first two years) of ROTC in order to qualify for a degree. The Advanced Course (last two years) has always been voluntary and selective. Beginning in the fall of 1965, enrollment in the Basic Course became elective.

In 1972, Congress passed a bill eliminating the active draft program in favor of an all volunteer Army. The immediate effect of this legislation was manifested by a decrease in ROTC enrollment within the Cadet Corps. However, since then the enrollment has rebounded to such an extent that the enrollment figures for school year 82-83 are the highest since participation in ROTC became voluntary. Some of the enrollment increase has been due to the authorization of ROTC institutions to admit women starting with the fall semester of school year 1973-74. Since then women have accounted for approximately 20% of all university ROTC cadets.

Distinguished persons who have completed Army ROTC at the University of North Dakota include: Allen I. Olson--1961, Governor of the State of North Dakota; Elton Ringsak--1937, State Representative of North Dakota, Battalion Commander in World War II, and the Nation's Handicapped Person of the Year in 1975; General Donn Pepke--1939; Lieutenant Colonel Fred E. Smith--1894, awarded (posthumously) the Congressional Medal of Honor.
COMMANDERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA'S
MILITARY SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

Second Lieutenant Leon S. Roudiez 1890-1894
Second Lieutenant Charles S. Farnsworth 1894-1898
Major Albert E. Brown 1919-1924
Lieutenant Colonel William G. Doane 1924-1928
Major E. V. Smith 1928-1932
Major Merl P. Schillerstrom 1932-1937
Colonel Robert R. Welshmer 1937-1938
Colonel George W. C. Whiting 1938-1945
Captain R. B. Mefford 1945-1946
Lieutenant Colonel G. J. Check 1946-1948
Colonel Harlan R. Statham 1948-1950
Lieutenant Colonel David O. Byars 1950-1952
Lieutenant Colonel Paul T. Clifford 1952-1954
Lieutenant Colonel John C. Coughill 1954-1958
Colonel Lloyd E. Patch 1958-1961
Lieutenant Colonel John L. Tanner 1961-1964
Lieutenant Colonel Paul S. Morton 1964-1967
Colonel Robert Woodard 1967-1972
Colonel Abraham Muscari 1972-1976
Lieutenant Colonel William Foster 1976-1978
Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence Wollmering 1978-1981
Lieutenant Colonel Edward W. Gale 1981-present
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(2) IBID p. 244.

(3) IBID p. 296.

(4) IBID p. 302.

(5) IBID p. 389.

(6) IBID p. 401.