

100 YEARS STRONG

OU's ROTC program celebrates a century of service with a homecoming of warriors and restoration for the Armory.

BY ANNE BARAJAS HARP

A century of service started with a student meeting.

And since that day in 1917 when voluntary military training began for young men rushing off to World War I to the moment when 120 cadets passed in review before more than 80,000 cheering Sooner fans, the Army ROTC has been a cornerstone of the University of Oklahoma.

A yearlong celebration of the unit's 100th birthday crescendoed the weekend of Sept. 21 with a series of special events, from President James L. Gallogly and university administrators braving tandem parachute jumps to an alumni gathering and the OU-Army gridiron matchup. Competing with the game's dramatic outcome were spectacular military tributes and the announcement of a \$20 million gift to ROTC from James and Miriam Mulva of Green Bay, Wisc.





The OU Armory was built just one year before this 1920 photo was taken. The building's exterior is virtually unchanged, though its interior will undergo renovations supported by a gift from James and Miriam Mulva.

The Mulvas' gift will update the OU Armory, built in 1919 and home to both OU's Army and Naval/Marine ROTC, as well as facilities used by Air Force ROTC. Most important, it will provide opportunities for generations of OU students through a scholarship endowment for all three ROTC branches.

The endowment's impact will be felt far beyond the university's boundaries, says Capt. Ivan Wood, assistant professor of military science in the OU Army ROTC. "OU is not just influencing the 20 seniors who are commissioned every year. It's influencing the soldiers or paratroopers those cadets go on to lead. It's influencing their families and people they provide disaster relief for. It's influencing entire countries as our soldiers go to Afghanistan and Iraq.

"OU's sphere of influence is gigantic and far-reaching through the cadets and new second lieutenants who are generated by the Army ROTC program."

The first traces of that sphere were seen in the Student Army Training Corps, or SATC, a national program adopted at OU after the initial student meeting organized by

future U.S. Senator Josh Lee in April 1917. The Army took over much of campus with new wooden mess halls, barracks, stables and a canteen. More than 1,100 men drilled regularly with bayonet-topped wooden rifles carved by faculty advisers.

When the war ended just 18 months later, the OU marching band led a parade of students and Army cadets through downtown Norman. The SATC closed, but the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education soon required that all male students participate in a two-year military training program to provide a ready supply of college-educated officers. OU's answer was an Army ROTC unit to instill "self-reliance, confidence, initiative, courtesy and a keen sense of duty."

A \$65,000 brick armory with room for 60 horses, trucks, tractors and nine artillery pieces was designed by Durant native Jewell Hicks, the creator of Oklahoma's State Capitol. The armory's exterior remains much the same today.

Future journalist and screenwriter George Milburn described the OU Armory as "smelling of saddle soap and gun grease," a place "where college students are being taught with expensive, death-dealing equipment how most efficiently to



The caissons go rolling along in this photo from the 1926 Sooner yearbook. One drill required the cadets to dismount and remount the horses in motion. 1928 OU graduate Frank Dennis recalled once landing backwards on a member of the six-horse team during a hasty remount.

reduce their fellows to the parent clay.”

OU 1928 graduate and newspaperman Frank Dennis wrote more lightly for *Sooner Magazine*, “We all had to handle six-horse teams pulling caissons ... The highlight of my ROTC career was the time when I had to ride one of the lead horses, then get off and back onto the critter while the outfit was at a trot. I got off all right, and got back on all right, except that when I got back on, I was facing the wrong direction.”

Though the ROTC program expanded to four years for those who wished to earn an Army commission, many chose the two-year track. Among alumni of these early years were such luminaries as U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives Carl Albert and OU’s sixth president, Joseph A. Brandt.

The armory became a hub of OU student life, with the Military Ball the social highlight of the year and unit matches in football, wrestling and boxing drawing spectators from campus and town. The Army ROTC’s pistol team won five national championships through the 1930s, and the unit’s men’s and women’s polo squads earned more titles than any other college teams from 1929 to 1934.

Now an artillery branch training school, OU Army ROTC produced so many field artillery reserve officers during the 1930s that it was “a crucial factor in the rapid expansion of (America’s) field artillery in 1940, ’41 and ’42,” said Deputy Commanding General of the Fourth Army Maj. Gen. Lewis Griffing. A 1944 *Sooner Magazine* article stated that OU Army ROTC commissioned more than 4,200 officers serving in World War II.

Among them were Congressional Medal of Honor recipients Col. John Lucian Smith and Lt. Col. Leon R. Vance. Lt. Col. Edwin Price Ramsey led the last horse cavalry charge in U.S. military history during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines.

But as world wars waned, OU students and parents began questioning the necessity of two-year military training. In a 1959 *Sooner Magazine* article, Army ROTC professor Metticus May argued that a university was the best place to maintain highly educated reserve forces, especially as society faced nuclear proliferation.

“No longer are personal bravery, leadership ability and personal integrity the main requirements in an officer candidate,” he wrote. “The present-day officer must be a technician, military leader, planner, administrator and diplomat.”

Public pressure brought compulsory ROTC to an end at OU in 1965, and Army ROTC was briefly swept up in the 1970 national outrage against student deaths at Kent State University. An annual ROTC Field Day awards ceremony became ground zero for OU student protests that week, but OU administrators, faculty, staff and Professor of Military Science Leroy Land wisely accommodated students’ constitutional rights to assembly and the day ended peacefully.

A few months later, the OU community was crushed to learn that Army ROTC alumnus and All-American Sooner tackle Bob Kalsu was killed in Vietnam. Kalsu, the rookie of the year for the NFL’s Buffalo Bills, was the only American professional athlete to die in Vietnam combat.



Travis Caperton



Above: A sketch from the 1926 Sooner year-book. Left: One of five members of the “Black Daggers” U.S. Army Special Operations Command Parachute Demonstration Team touches down in front of more than 80,000 electrified fans preceding the OU-Army football game.

Below: Members of the Ft. Sill Artillery Half Section lead a caisson featuring American Quarter Horses and a 1917 cannon to the OU Armory. The brigade processed across campus behind the Pride of Oklahoma Marching Band during the OU-Army pre-game parade.



Travis Caperton

But the turmoil of the times did not dissuade 1972 graduates and OU Army ROTC classmates Dale Magnin and Brian McConnell. Both came from military families and knew that ROTC offered an opportunity to serve and a path to the future.

"I remember being overwhelmed as an OU freshman coming out of high school, where our time was meticulously planned out," says McConnell. "You had to be self-motivated and, frankly, it took me a while to get there. Army ROTC began the process of maturing a very immature 17-year-old, helped me find who I was as a person and gave me confidence. It was a life-changer for me."

McConnell especially remembers participating in tactical drills and maneuvers with his Army ROTC friends, sometimes in the dead of winter on wooded land where OU's Lloyd Noble Center now stands. By contrast, Magnin's most vivid memories surround the six weeks they spent at Army ROTC camp near Cache, Okla. "You're living in eight-men tents out in the hills during summer in Oklahoma, and you're always watching for rattlesnakes," he recalls.

With the Vietnam War winding down, both Magnin and McConnell requested overseas deployment and were stationed in South Korea. McConnell was perilously near the DMZ. "It was the closest I could get to what I thought I was trained to do," he says wryly. "Of course, I was 22 and fairly dumb."

McConnell spent 11 years in active duty – including a stint at Ft. Sill during which he earned a master's degree from OU – and 16 years in the Army Reserves, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. He completed two more master's degrees and launched successful careers in manufacturing management,



Travis Caperton

There was hardly a dry eye in Oklahoma Memorial Stadium when Sgt. Brandy McDill, who is serving with Oklahoma's National Guard 45th Infantry Brigade in Afghanistan, surprised her reunited family and brought fans to their feet during the OU-Army game.

Operations Center Coordinator following the 1995 bombing of Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

"The second the tornado strikes or the bomb hits or the bridge is taken out over the Arkansas River, everything changes. Nothing happens like you planned," he says, adding that his many years of preparation began with Army ROTC. "But you have to go through the training so that the next person in line knows your job

and what to do. In the Army, we're training the guys behind us to step forward and take charge."

Today, Magnin and McConnell prepare the next generation through service to the OU Army ROTC Alumni Association Board. Both have established scholarships, and Magnin has walked alongside OU students at the annual 26-mile Bataan Death March in New Mexico.

Fellow board member and 1981 graduate Charlotte Brantley Stevenson came to Army ROTC after turning down an appointment to West Point in favor of an Army ROTC scholarship so she could pursue a degree in nursing at OU. "I

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higher education and aviation consultancy.

Magnin's military career took him to Europe as a Pershing missile battery commander during the mid-1980s, when nuclear tensions were high. He later was present for a successful Pershing II missile test that ended with a phone call to President Ronald Reagan and served as part of the team charged with ensuring the continuity of government in case of nuclear war.

Two decades of experiences readied the retired lieutenant colonel for an additional, 14-year career in Oklahoma emergency planning, including acting as the Oklahoma Emergency



Col. Timothy Brown (left), deputy commander of cadet command for Army ROTC, and Col. Christopher Alfeiri, 5th brigade commander in cadet command, thank Miriam and James Mulva for their leadership gift to OU ROTC.

grew up believing that my calling was to be a nurse,” she says.

ROTC meant family to Stevenson – in more ways than one. Three of her siblings joined the unit and her older brother, Charles, racked up so many awards that he is on the armory’s Wall of Fame. Stevenson also formed priceless friendships with women from her class. Reunited at September’s centennial tailgate, they shared photos of their unique bond throughout the decades and, a few hours later, would be among more than 350 alumni, reservists and active military to cover Owen Field with an undulating American flag.

“ROTC was the best part of my college experience,” says Stevenson, who also earned a master’s degree from OU and is now a retired Army lieutenant colonel with three clinics under her charge at Ft. Sill. “What I learned in ROTC allowed me to thrive in an environment where there is order out of chaos, structure, leadership and all those things that set people up for success. It was critical and instrumental in my development as an officer and as a nurse.”

Stevenson says she is grateful for the opportunity to give back to OU Army ROTC. “I’ve heard the line: ‘What does a warrior do without a war?’ Well, you involve yourself in the next generation of warriors. Our alumni scholarships make it possible for people to make a mark in their own special way.”

John Johnson made his mark early. He entered the National Guard out of high school and joined OU Army ROTC after basic training. “I was fascinated with the discipline and the order of the military,” he says. “Doing something that not a lot of people are willing to do.”

That willingness led Johnson to one elite appointment after another. He went to Airborne School while still in college and Ranger School soon after his 2004 graduation. Johnson was picked for the Honor Guard – the Army unit serving the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the White House – before requesting to attend medical school. “I felt that my Army experiences gave me a better perspective on things than some of my medical school classmates,” he con-

fides. “Hungry? Tired? It’s not that big of a deal.”

Today, Johnson is an Army major and an orthopedic surgeon at Ft. Bragg. “ROTC opened the doorway to the opportunities that I’ve had,” he says. “Becoming an infantry officer was just the tip of the spear. Every time I come back to visit the unit, I feel like, ‘This is where it all started.’”

And for many like OU senior Madeleine Stone, the OU Army ROTC – with its century of service, education and sacrifice – is where it all will continue. Stone is a third-generation Army ROTC member. Her grandfather, Dr. James McKenzie, graduated from OU in 1961, her aunt, Margaret Stone Griffith, in 1982, and her father, retired Lt. Col. Andy Stone, in 1986.

“My favorite part of ROTC is the skills and work ethic I’ve developed since being in the program. I think that has translated already to so many other areas of my life,” says Stone, who is among more than 30 women in the unit and, uniquely, one of three who also are members of Kappa Alpha Theta social sorority. When she enters active military service next year, Stone will join more than 6,000 officers commissioned by OU Army ROTC since its inception.

“I’m living on a family tradition and a legacy through the OU Army ROTC that is pretty special,” she says.