



The cadets of Leavenworth High School, Kan., in 1899

Kansas Trained Cadets 20 Years Before JROTC

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On Dec. 8, 1896, the *Leavenworth Times* in Kansas reported that Capt. J.F. Huston had secured a commission from the War Department to take command of Leavenworth High School's cadets and that the so-called Committee on Cadet Drill had adopted a resolution asking the war secretary to provide 150 Springfield cadet rifles with bayonets, and 150 cartridge boxes and belts.

"Every boy" in the high school "was enjoying the privileges of military drill," the newspaper reported, "except three or four boys whose duties as newsboys made it impossible."

This small article announced the arrival of what would eventually become today's Junior ROTC (JROTC) program at Leavenworth High School, when the National Defense Act of 1916 led to the January 1917 designation of the Leavenworth Corps of Cadets as a Reserve Officers' Training Corps. While this school year marks the official 100th anniversary of the program, the 20 years that preceded the corps' establishment demonstrate the pioneering spirit of the city of Leavenworth and its high school.

Tradition holds that students first approached Fort Leavenworth to gain drill instruction because of world events in 1896—particularly with an eye toward Cuba. Their desire for preparedness turned out to be warranted, as demonstrated by this passage in the 1904 yearbook: "Several years ago the High School boasted of a cadet company. Because of the great demand for well-drilled officers during the Spanish-American war there was hardly a private left in the ranks of the corps." As pre-1904 cadet

rosters have not been located, it is not known how dramatic this drain on personnel was, but numbers in the early years of the program generally ranged between 30 and 50.

Multiple-Day Marches

Activities in these early years weren't limited to military drills alone. In addition to tactics, cadets also conducted annual multiple-day marches to outlying cities. The 1908 yearbook described an annual hike early in the morning of April 22, in a heavy rain. "The ill-fated town of McLouth was their destination," the report said. "Within a short distance of McLouth a farmer's wife and two daughters commiserated the fatigued and hungry boys and undertook to feed them. ... Her pity changed to awe at the disappearance of victuals, then to wrath, and she forced the boys to evacuate, unconditionally, her premises. The distance of twenty odd miles was made in twelve hours. ... To avenge the loss of a baseball game to the natives, we paraded the town till the wee small hours of the morning, singing High School lays, and incidentally assisted at the McLouth school commencement exercises, though be it, our outside assistance was not appreciated."

A drill competition with Wentworth Military School was described in 1906. In 1907, the corps of cadets began hosting dances at the high school, known as Cadet Hops. These dances soon evolved into the annual Military Ball.

One of the most interesting occurrences was the creation of a company of Girl Cadets in 1912. According to the yearbook, the organization of the Girl Cadets reflected that of the boys' corps "as nearly as possible, and subject to the same rules and

regulations." This organization is all the more remarkable considering the Girl Scouts began the same year, in Georgia.

The Girl Cadets company boasted 25 members—only five fewer than the boys. The yearbook stated that the girls' company "supplies a long felt need, and there can be no doubt but that it has come to stay." There is no mention of the group after the 1913 yearbook, however, so it seems it did not last long.

In preparation for possible entry into the Great War taking place in Europe, the National Defense Act of 1916 authorized and formalized military training at high schools and universities across the nation. Leavenworth High School applied to become an infantry unit of the Junior Division, Reserve Officers' Training Corps. The orders from Jan. 29, 1917, spelled out the requirements. They included a two-year course of military training as a minimum for its physically fit male students, and it was a prerequisite for graduation.

The corps of cadets swelled to 159 members, as retired Lt. Col. E.B. Fuller was appointed the instructor of military science. Six of these cadets were dropped from the rolls in April after they (and three of their classmates) joined the Kansas National Guard following the U.S. declaration of war on Germany.

Transitional Year

The 1917–18 school year was a transitional one for the cadets, as the authorization for the establishment of ROTC at the high school was withdrawn in October. It is unclear why this happened, although an account in a later yearbook suggests the War Department decided to withdraw support



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The Girl Cadets corps was established in 1912 at Leavenworth High School, Kan., but it didn't last long.

of junior division units because men were needed to fight in World War I instead of serving as ROTC instructors. Whatever the reason, the high school was allowed to maintain its rifles, and 95 cadets continued to drill and carry on the corps' traditions. When the war ended, the school reapplied for ROTC and, following an inspection, the War Department once again assigned it an instructor of military science.

The 1919 yearbook was dedicated "to the gold stars in our service flag. ... May it carry comfort into the homes of these heroes and may it serve to bring back fond memories of these boys who have made the Supreme Sacrifice for us." The annual also listed the names of 10 students and alumni and one faculty member who died during the war, as well as nine faculty and 121 graduates who served.

In December 1919, ROTC was officially reinstated at Leavenworth High, and "every boy ... was enrolled" with the exception of those under the age of 14, and "those physically unfit."

The 1920s saw continued growth of the battalion as well as the addition of some specialized units. Buglers had been with the corps since at least 1905, and a full-fledged band—the precursor to the drum and bugle corps—appeared for the first time in 1926. There is photographic evidence of a female Cadet Corps "mascot" in 1899, but the tradition of battalion sponsors took hold in 1920, when it was initiated at the recommendation of the professor of military science and tactics, Capt. Louis Whitney, who had observed the practice at his previous military school posting. The girls had to have a high standing in the school and be well regarded by both genders, as they were nominated by the boys of the ROTC and voted on by the girls of the high school.

In 1921, the cadets acted as an honor guard for Gen. John J. Pershing and Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch when they visited Fort Leavenworth, and again in 1926 for President Calvin Coolidge when he dedicated the Liberty Memorial in Kansas

City, Mo. A rifle team that would attain national prominence in the '60s and '70s was firmly established in 1923, aided greatly by a dedicated indoor firing range. In 1929, the cadets finally earned the rating of Honor Unit, one of five schools to do so in the Seventh Corps five-state area. The corps has maintained that rating for most of its existence.

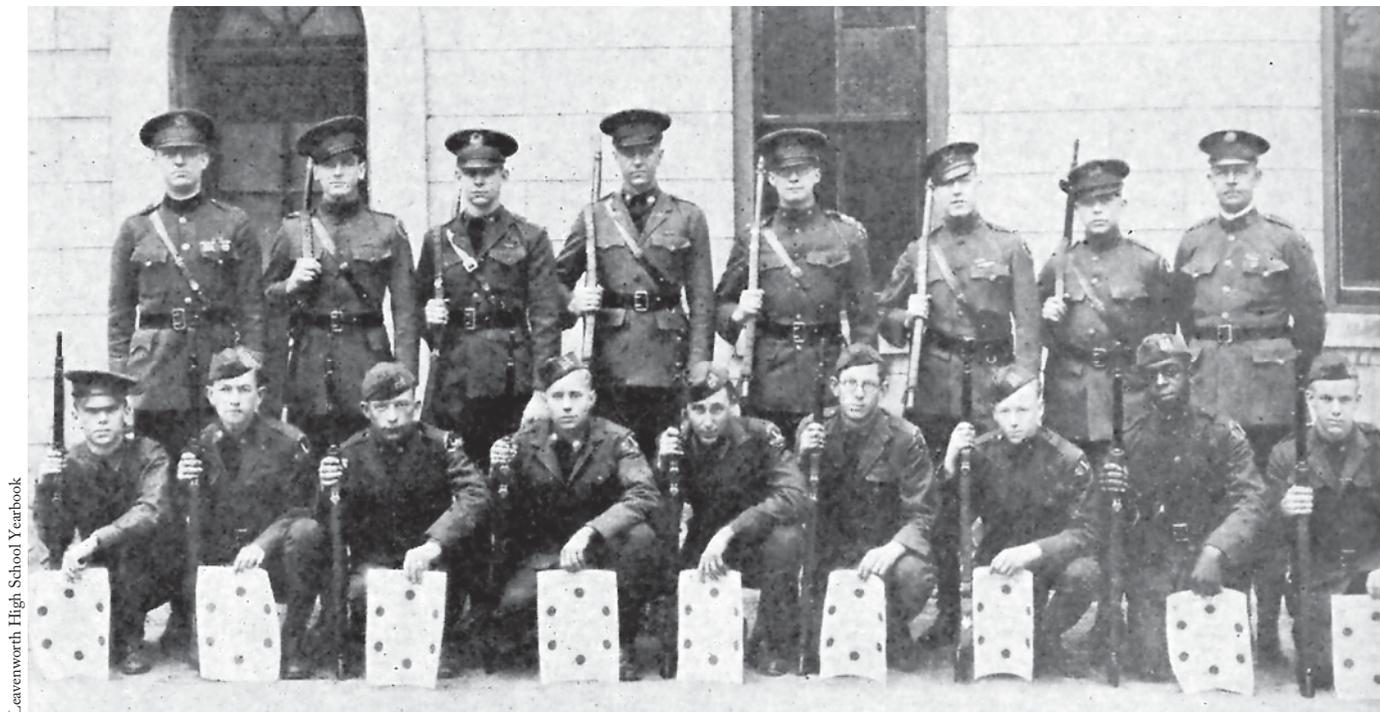
Regimental Reorganization

Leavenworth ROTC began the '30s with 226 cadets; that number grew to over 275 during the 1936–37 school year. Because of this, the corps was reorganized into a regiment with two battalions. The 1938 yearbook painted a different mission of ROTC than that at its inception. A passage said that "contrary to the general belief that the ROTC is a course of military instruction conceived for war preparation only," the main purpose of the program was to train young men "to be good citizens and leaders in later life. The general object of ROTC is to '... inculcate in the students habits of precision, orderliness, courtesy, correctness of posture and deportment, leadership, and respect for and loyalty to constituted authority.'"

It is assumed this passage quoted from an official ROTC document. It is somewhat ironic given the nation was three years from a global war. The 1942 yearbook described the importance of the program to the nation, stating:

In view of the present emergency, our ROTC unit is especially important. The cadets of today will write the history of tomorrow. Many of the cadet officers will rally to the colors in the immediate future. These young men will display their ROTC training on the field of battle as they fight for their precious heritage. Let us pray that our American ideals will be preserved.

This proved an accurate prediction, proven by the plaque in the school hallway bearing the names of 42 Leavenworth



Leavenworth High School Yearbook

Members of the 1925 cadet rifle team at Leavenworth High School, Kan.



The 2013 “military appreciation” football game at Leavenworth High School featured the Kansas school’s Junior ROTC Color Guard.

High School alumni who died in service to their country during World War II.

In the postwar years, the cadet population fell below 200 for the first time since 1926, and the corps was reorganized into a battalion in 1945. In 1952, the community again affirmed the importance of ROTC at Leavenworth by erecting a 9,800-square-foot building exclusively for the cadets’ use, complete with a five-point firing range. This facility certainly played a role in the move by the rifle team to go co-ed in 1958—17 years before young women were officially allowed to join the ROTC programs. (The girls’ rifle team would capture a national title in 1965.) Once again, ROTC cadets would need to use their skills following graduation, this time in Korea.

The ’60s brought some changes to the corps of cadets. The Cadet Rangers, the precursor to today’s Raider team, was established in 1961. Enrollment in the program grew, reaching nearly 400 cadets in the 1964–65 school year. This increase led to another reorganization as the corps became a brigade with two battalions of three companies each. The late ’60s also began the trend of national dominance by the rifle team as in 1967, they won the first of 25 national shooting titles.

Welcoming Female Students

The ’70s proved to be pivotal for the program, which came to be known as JROTC. In 1976, the program became an elective and was opened to female students. Many ROTC alumni and community members decried the end of mandatory enrollment for sophomore boys, fearing the program would cease to exist without this requirement. This prediction turned out to be false, as the program flourished under the new guidelines. Female enrollment nearly equaled the male losses, and young

women quickly occupied leadership positions. In three years, the first female brigade commander was named.

More than 40 years later, JROTC is still an integral part of the school and the surrounding community. The Color Guard performs at more than 80 events annually, and the drill teams and Raiders continue to win regional meets and be competitive nationally. The rifle team is working toward regaining its national dominance, placing second at the Kansas state rifle meet in 2015, the first time this meet has been held in many years. The Drum and Bugle Corps, Cadet Choir, Saber Guard, Cannon Crew and Junior Guard teams provide leadership and performance opportunities for the corps of cadets, and support the surrounding community.

In 2015, the cadets helped Leavenworth High School celebrate its 150th anniversary, paying the school back for the support it has given to the program for more than a century. The current cadet leaders are well aware of the legacy they have inherited, and they are working hard to add to the storied history of the program. ★

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