Centennial of ROTC at Wofford

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American entry into World War I in April 1917 saw the Army begin to scramble to find enough trained officers. Many Wofford students and alumni entered military service directly, and President Henry Nelson Snyder put the college on a more military footing as soon as the United States entered the war. In 1918, the college organized the student body into a Student Army Training Corps to provide military training to almost every student. The SATC dominated life on campus through the remainder of World War I. When the war ended, the student body quickly reverted to civilian control. The success of the SATC set the stage for the creation of ROTC in 1919.
As the Army emerged from World War I, it recognized the need for a larger number of reserve officers who it could call to active duty in an emergency or in a future war. The concept had its roots in the practices of many land-grant colleges, many of which were organized as a corps of cadets, and from Norwich University in Vermont, which was founded with the idea of producing citizen-soldiers. The National Defense Act of 1916 authorized granting commissions to college graduates who had taken an appropriate course of study and had qualified to serve as officers. Wofford's quick acceptance of the wartime SATC made requesting an ROTC presence on campus seem to be an obvious choice. The faculty adopted the required courses in military science and tactics, creating a department that would be staffed by Army officers. The college received the orders creating a senior college ROTC unit on Dec. 28, 1919.
The 1920s saw ROTC take root on the campus. During the 1924-25 academic year, 37 seniors, 65 juniors, 63 sophomores and 114 first-year students were on the ROTC roster. The course of study continued to be split between a two-year basic course and a two-year advanced course. Between their junior and senior year, students were expected to attend summer camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama. Three Army captains and a staff sergeant were responsible for leading ROTC at Wofford. Students learned military courtesy and discipline, hygiene and first aid, drill and command, scouting and patrolling, and marksmanship in their first year. During the second, they learned musketry, drill and command, automatic rifle training, scouting and patrolling, and combat principles. During the advanced course, juniors learned about map reading, military sketching, drill and command, machine guns, mortars, and combat principles at the platoon level. Seniors studied military law and reserve regulations, military history and polity, administration, field engineering and more advanced combat principles.
The stock market crash of 1929 brought further challenges to Wofford students, making ROTC an even more important part of the campus. Students in the advanced course depended on the stipends and uniforms issued by the Army, and for many of them, that stipend made the difference between staying in college and leaving. The fall of 1931 saw 241 students in ROTC, and the fall of 1933 saw 282 students taking part in a student body of around 400-500. The stipend in 1930 was around $109 per year, which all students in the advanced course received. All students, basic or advanced, received arms, equipment and outer clothing except for shoes. College officials in the late 1930s felt that even more students would take the advanced course if the Army would allow more than 50 or so students to enroll.

The summer of 1940 saw Wofford’s ROTC cadets win a significant honor at their summer encampment; they placed first out of the 28 colleges in the South. Each cadet was rated on leadership, conduct, field training, rifle firing, athletics and other activities. This marked the first time that Wofford’s cadets had received this honor. or the first time in the history of ROTC at Wofford, the college’s group collectively had the highest rating of any group.
“Four times in its history, Wofford College has been called to war,” began President Henry Nelson Snyder’s message to Wofford alumni in December 1941. World War II proved ROTC’s value to the campus and the nation and profoundly changed the college. By the eve of World War II, around 780 Wofford graduates had received commissions through Wofford’s ROTC unit. Nationally, ROTC provided some 100,000 officers to the army, far outnumbering the 14,000 regular army officers then serving. About 600 Wofford alumni were serving as active duty officers by 1943, and nearly all had received their training at Wofford. While the Army did not completely abolish ROTC during World War II, they did considerably scale it back, no doubt relying on officer candidate schools to supply urgent demand. The basic ROTC course continued, and many of the students who remained in college took it.

During much of 1943 and 1944, the Army took over the campus, using the facilities as a college training detachment for aviation students. The program, run largely by the air corps, was designed to give non-college graduates a portion of a college education before sending them to officer candidate school and flight school. During those 15 months, Wofford first and second year students took their courses at Spartanburg Junior College, and juniors and seniors took courses at Converse. The college recognized the 76 alumni who died in World War II at a memorial service in February 1946.
Having proved its value to the campus and the nation during World War II, ROTC returned as strong as ever after the war. The student body grew beyond its usual pre-war size of 500 students as GIs rushed to complete bachelor's degrees. The largest student organization on campus appears to have been the Veteran's Club, and the college even had about 32 apartments on campus for married students. The 1947 yearbook noted that the post-war ROTC unit was almost as large as the pre-war program, and that the officers in charge were popular “despite the fact that most of the student body had been in some branch of the service.” While the professor of military science and tactics before World War II was generally a captain, after the war, the position was generally held by a lieutenant colonel or colonel. ROTC remained a force on campus well into the 1960s, with the battalion generally being organized into several companies along with a band and rifle team.
The mid-1960s saw a new generation begin to arrive at Wofford, and American involvement in the Vietnam War brought tensions on campuses throughout the country. While ROTC remained popular at Wofford and participation in the battalion remained high, student criticism of the draft and of the war in Vietnam appeared in the Old Gold and Black. In the spring of 1969, the newspaper editors joined a nationwide call for an end to ROTC on the campus, a call that was ignored at Wofford.
ROTC remained active at Wofford in the years after Vietnam, though with noticeably fewer students taking part in the program in the 1970s and 1980s. The program expanded beyond the Wofford campus, with students at Spartanburg Methodist College beginning to participate in 1970. Later, Converse College, USC-Spartanburg (now USC-Upstate) and Limestone College joined the cross-enrollment program. Women also began to participate in 1973. The battalion's headquarters moved around campus, from the old ROTC Building (a former Wofford Fitting School building near the current Papadopoulos Building) to Snyder House and eventually to the Daniel Building. The battalion remained a visible presence on campus, presenting the colors at athletic events, offering Interim projects, and on lab days, wearing their uniforms.
The culmination of four years of study and training occurs when each ROTC student receives his or her commission as a second lieutenant. At Wofford, the commissioning ceremony traditionally occurs during Commencement weekend. The commissioning ceremony itself is full of symbolism as each cadet takes the oath of office, has the gold bars of a second lieutenant pinned on their uniform, receives their commission, and then receives their first salute. Once they’ve been commissioned, newly-minted second lieutenants (and college graduates) generally attend a basic officer leader course that is specific to their branch of the Army.

**Commissioning**

Photographs from ROTC commissioning, including new second lieutenants taking the oath, receiving their commissions, and receiving their first salutes.
While students in ROTC spend a lot of time in daily physical training, weekly classes and labs, and extended summer training at different Army bases, they also find time to celebrate a number of Army rituals during the year. Beyond the commissioning ceremony, these might include a military ball and a dining-in. In 2019, ROTC held a centennial ball to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the battalion's founding.
Scabbard and Blade is a military honor society established in 1904. Wofford received a charter for M company, 6th regiment of Scabbard and Blade in 1928. Wofford’s chapter was open to junior and senior members of ROTC, and members were chosen solely on merit. A cadet who was chosen for Scabbard and Blade had qualities of leadership and honor, according to descriptions in several yearbooks.
The Southern Guards Battalion continues at Wofford today, with cross-enrollment agreements with USC-Upstate and Converse College. The Department of Military Science offers basic and advanced courses as well as opportunities for basic and advanced summer camps, airborne and air assault schools and other leadership courses. Students in ROTC frequently present the colors at Wofford athletic events. Their presence on campus today represents an element of service to community and country that has long been part of the Wofford tradition.