



A Brief Account of the University of Saskatchewan Contingent, Canadian Officers Training Corps

By D. F. Robertson

VE Day in Europe was 8 May 1945, some sixty years ago. Fighting against Japan continued until the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 8 and 9 August with the official surrender on VJ Day shortly thereafter. On 1 September 1945 the Canadian element of the newly formed Pacific Force was disbanded. One of the more immediate results of all this meant the release from the three services, by one calculation, of some 495,000 personnel. While many returned to their previous occupations a very large number, estimated at 150,000,¹ took advantage of government sponsored education in Canadian universities. Former President W. P. Thompson, in *The University of Saskatchewan, A Personal History*, pointed out that the first of these, “air crew and those who had been wounded, sick or disabled,” began to return to the University of Saskatchewan in 1943. By 1946 there were more than 2,500 and by 1951 most had either finished their course or had left for other reasons.²

But this was not the first encounter of the university with military life. The story really began during the Great War with the formation of the University of Saskatchewan Contingent of the Canadian Officers Training Corps in December 1915. There had been a form of military training, apparently largely drill and marching, carried out in the earlier days of the war. However with the official formation under the command of C. J. Mackenzie, a civil engineer who became Dean many years later, the unit found itself “the most gratuitous of military formations – a draft finding unit – and so the Saskatchewan men reinforced the McGill University Contingent, the Princess Pats and the 28th Battalion.”³ These are the words of President J. S. Thomson, writing much later in his capacity as Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel of the COTC. His notes, along with *WUB, Western Universities Battalion-196th*,⁴ published in Camp Hughes (later renamed Camp Shilo), give some idea of these earlier days.

This new 196th Battalion came into being 14 February 1916 in Manitoba and was the first such formation in Canada. It really owed its inception to a student movement wherein many who had previously enlisted found themselves scattered in various units and thus lost their identity as western university men. By December 1915 the Manitoba COTC spearheaded the idea of one formation and requested the Minister of Militia to

raise a western universities battalion along with a field ambulance. Their request was well received and approved in late January of 1916. A committee of organization met on 7 February and “decided that the Universities of Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia should recruit one company each, the University of Saskatchewan three platoons and Brandon College one platoon of the remaining company. The selection of officers for the companies was left in the hands of the universities concerned.”⁵

The same issue of the Camp Hughes newspaper carried a short article on this fourth or “B” Company of which three platoons were to be made up of men from Saskatchewan and one platoon from Brandon College. Actual recruiting had been started some eight months earlier when Capt. J. P. Oliver opened a recruiting office in the new university residence later known as Qu’Appelle Hall. By the beginning of May recruiting was almost complete. The article waxes rather eloquently when it says, “The boys, most of whom came to Saskatoon to recruit, are of true university type. The University of Saskatchewan and the collegiates at Saskatoon, Yorkton and Battleford, contributed widely, while many others left prominent positions in cities and towns and from the farms of Saskatchewan.”⁶ At the end of March 1916 command of the Saskatchewan Company was assumed by Capt. Reginald Bateman, a professor of English at the University, who returned from overseas for this appointment. He was later killed in action.

The 196th Battalion as a unit did not last long. Shortly after arrival in England it was broken up to reinforce existing units including the already existing 46th battalion largely made up of men from Saskatchewan. One account refers to the 46th as the “suicide battalion” which fought in some of the bloodiest actions of the war. A large portion of the men became officers. One account has it that of the 5,374 men in this unit 4,917 were killed or wounded. It was demobilized at the end of the war and many men either re-enrolled or became first time students at the university.⁷

Statistics from the University of Saskatchewan reveal, “330 students served in the forces during the war. 250 of these joined before conscription was instituted in 1917, and at least 46 of the remaining 80 were also volunteers. In addition 72 of the 148 male graduates of the university served. 66 students died or were killed in action: more than 100 were wounded. 33 were awarded medals for valour.”⁸ President W. P. Thompson broke out the 330 figure into 322 students and 8 faculty members as well as mentioning 34 awards.⁹

A reading of President Walter C. Murray’s papers reveals his intense and personal interest in each student and faculty member who went off to war. For example, there were letters of sympathy to bereaved families, and arrangements were made for Christmas packages. On the military side Murray acknowledged that his university had to accept the same terms for training as others in Canada. In fact this meant it would not receive any arms or equipment. Consequently it is a bit difficult to imagine how effective their COTC training would be under these circumstances!

At the end of the war the university was offered some captured German trophies: a light machine gun, a heavy machine gun and two trench mortars. And in a letter of 25 October 1919 came a further offer of a German Fokker bi-plane, “for education/exhibition purposes and to be suitably stored.”¹⁰ This gift was duly accepted by the Engineering faculty on 17 November subject to the approval of the Board of Governors and was destined for the new Engineering Building. The Board agreed on 16 December. When the plane arrived it was placed on display at the north end of the tractor laboratory. It was here on 13 March 1925 that a fire started which destroyed the building. It has been suggested that not only was the plane destroyed by fire, it may have caused the fire!¹¹

Little else is on record for the immediate post war years beyond a letter from the Military Headquarters in Regina granting permission for all returned men to wear their uniforms on 30 January 1920 for a social evening recognizing their return from overseas service.¹² There are also several lists of returned men indicating whether or not they were disabled, courses taken, positions obtained and salaries earned.

President J. S. Thomson noted in 1946:

When the [1914-1918] war was over, the effects of these early experiences passed beyond sentiment into activity. A keen young Professor of Dairying had joined the staff – one Arthur Potts by name – and he reorganized the COTC in 1920. Then ensued the quiet and unpretentious work of training undergraduates to qualify for “A” and “B” certificates. The size of the Contingent expanded and contracted in response to the varying moods of the student body concerning national defence. At one period, a group left to join the RCAF, among these men was Ernie Macnab who was to become a Group Captain during the war. But a steady stream of men qualified for commissions in the Infantry, Engineers, Artillery and Medical Corps, and it was only when what had really been a period of extended armistice terminated, that the real value of the persistent effort of the years was revealed. Without the contribution of the COTC, Canada could never have made her swift and decisive contribution to the new call for action in 1939.¹³

So what did the COTC do during the approximately 20 years it was commanded by Arthur Potts? There was an exchange of correspondence between H. T. Logan, Chairman of Military Affairs at the University of British Columbia, and President Murray respecting consideration of a military policy and the COTC in Vancouver. Several questions on Military Science were examined and Murray noted that the COTC programme in Saskatoon extended over two years with one half course per session being given as a credit. About two-fifths of the male student body (some 170 students) were enrolled in 1920. About 40 returned men formed the nucleus of this group. The response further states that the aim or objective was to have “a smart unit without too much bull ... though there were comparatively few inducements to offer the response to the appeal for recruits was surprising, despite the fact that scarcely anything but drill has been done (with a few lectures, some interesting).”¹⁴

There are three annual reports for 1924/25, 1925/26 and 1928/29 prepared by Arthur Potts. The first of these notes an enrolment of ninety-one from all ranks with two drill and lecture periods per week plus Saturday afternoon musketry practice. In the spring term lectures were increased prior to examinations. Out of eighteen who wrote the War

Office examinations for Certificate "A" fifteen passed. Six wrote the Certificate "B" paper but only one passed. However the local COTC with a pass rate of 66% compared favourably with the Dominion rate of 47%. Five members attended Air Force Training in Camp Borden and two members joined the Air Force while seven members joined various units of the army. In 1925/26 there were ninety-two members of whom twenty-three wrote examinations with fifteen being successful. By 1928/29 the numbers had increased to 183. Seven were granted commissions in the COTC and three, having completed training joined the Air Force. One of these was Ernie McNab, referred to earlier.¹⁵

As for Arthur Potts himself, happily we have a news item which appeared in *The Star Phoenix* in 1942 when he had been promoted to the rank of major-general:

General Potts, the new 6th Division commander, is 51 ... a native of Northumberland, England, was educated at Heriot's School and the University of Edinburgh, where he received a bachelor of science degree. Later he attended Cornell University, took his master's degree in agriculture and then went to Ames College in Iowa as an instructor. He left there in 1915 to enlist in the Second Universities Company at McGill University – one of six brothers who served in the First Great War, three of whom lost their lives – and was attached to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry as a private. He was appointed lieutenant after being wounded in September 1916. Toward the end of 1917 he was transferred to the education office of the "Khaki University" but soon after rejoined his battalion and was again wounded. He was convalescing in England when the armistice was signed. Following the war he was appointed head of the dairy department of the University of Saskatchewan and while there [re]organized and developed the university's officer training corps.¹⁶

In 1934 he was also to become commander of the Saskatoon Non-Permanent Active Militia garrison and officer commanding the 19th infantry brigade with the rank of colonel. This was his rank when the Second World War broke out. Later that year Potts received a telephone call from then Maj.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton asking him if he would revert to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and take over command of the Saskatoon Light Infantry. Potts' comment at the time was that it seemed logical to move from teaching men to be farmers to teaching them to be soldiers. He took the Saskatoon unit overseas in December 1939 and remained as commander until promoted to Brigadier and given command of the Second Canadian Infantry Brigade in 1940.¹⁷ He commanded this formation at the time of the Spitzbergen Raid in August of 1941. By some accounts this raid was not of great importance although it was a "tactical success."¹⁸

Potts was again promoted and as a major-general commanded the 6th Infantry Division with headquarters in British Columbia. In 1943 he was appointed to the command of Military District 2 in Toronto.¹⁹ After the war he joined the Department of Veterans Affairs and in 1949 moved to Kingston, Ontario as the Department's district administrator, finally retiring in 1955. He died in early September 1983.²⁰

The story of COTC life between the two world wars is mundane to say the least. Weekly parades, drill, lectures and two weeks at a summer camp at Dundurn appear to be the "stuff of soldiering" in those days. But, as noted in 1939, President J. S. Thomson

considered the contribution to be a valuable one as shortly after the outbreak of war he wrote to Brigadier Russell, Commander of Military District 12 at Regina, offering his opinion of the COTC. He commented on the fact that with the outbreak of war the university received two pieces of advice from the National Research Council of Canada. The first was “that students ... in scientific, medical, dental, agricultural or engineering studies, should continue their work and should be advised to complete their studies.” The second was “that students should be advised to join the Canadian Officers Training Corps. This second piece of advice we have endeavoured to carry through here.” Thus the University Council advised the various faculties “that students who were taking the Officers Training Corps course should get some relief from the ordinary curriculum.” This was done. At the same time President J. S. Thomson kept in close contact with Lieutenant-Colonel Potts in addition to taking his own role as Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel very seriously. Consequently, at the time of his writing, nearly 400 members of the university, be they graduates or undergraduates, had volunteered for the Corps. Potts, for his part, had requested a new establishment for the COTC up to 400 strong along with additional personnel, both instructional and administrative.²¹

The University Military Education Committee, through its secretary Prof. H. H. Ferns, recommended a reorganization of 4 companies of 3 platoons each, an additional officer, Lt. J. C. Crawford, as chief instructor full time and 2 non-commissioned officers (NCOs) for clerical and instructional duties. This was followed by a request from the President to Brig. Russell for the appointment of Major J. H. Thompson, a professor of Accounting, to command the COTC replacing Arthur Potts. As Thompson was already serving in Regina as Deputy Assistant Adjutant General it was agreed that Major R. A. Spencer, from the College of Engineering and later dean, should be the acting commander of the COTC.²² Early in May of 1940, Major Thompson was released from the Active Force, returned to the campus as dean of the College of Accounting (later Commerce) and assumed command of the COTC.²³

Early in the game considerable re-organization and planning resulted in the President issuing a press release in which he outlined the obligation for all male students who would be physically fit and 21 years of age years of age by July 1941 to undergo military training. They were also obliged to attend a training camp for two weeks at the end of the academic term. “The cases of conscientious objectors will be considered by the University authorities in the same way as objections are dealt with under the National War Service Regulations.”²⁴

Later that year President J. S. Thomson wrote to the Hon. J. L. Ralston, Minister of National Defence, requesting assistance in obtaining more accommodation for the COTC. It was anticipated that there would be at least 1,000 male students eligible for such training in the up-coming session. The proposal was that the rink could be used provided suitable changes were made. Flooring would have to be laid down, unit heaters installed and an interior roof put in place at an estimated cost of \$9,000.00. His submission was that the Department of National Defence should foot the bill. He also stated that the University “is saving the country in pay, rations and accommodation an amount, which

otherwise would be required to be paid in respect of these young men, which amount exceeds the sum requested for putting the Ice Rink in order.”²⁵

As 1940 drew to a close *The Green and White* published a review of the steps taken in the training of potential officers and the requirements of military training on the campus. This review was written by Major R. M. Ferguson, who had commanded the auxiliary battalion during the first term that year and was now leaving for active service. He pointed out that when wartime training first began Major R. A. Spencer, then acting commander of the COTC, faced three problems. The first was organization. There were some 500 students and graduates training with over 600 in the auxiliary battalion (those men under the age of 21). Time tables had to be so arranged that these 1,100 men had six hours training a week along with their regular class schedule. The second problem was that of suitable and effective instruction. Many instructors had joined the active force and their place had to be taken by men who had taken COTC training the previous year and happily had returned to the university. And the third problem was where to train these men, hence the Rutherford rink had been taken over, *seemingly* without the help of the Department of National Defence as previously requested!²⁶

President J. S. Thomson, in a later issue of *The Green and White*, wrote at considerable length about “The Wartime University” pointing out that:

In war time it is a privilege to continue higher education, and this sense of favour carried with it obligations ... we have enrolled undergraduates up to the full permitted strength. The remainder of the student body form an auxiliary battalion all supplied with uniforms and required to become efficient soldiers. The University of Saskatchewan has a military unit of which we can be very proud. It is largely officered by members of the University staff, many of whom saw service in the last war ... there is a remarkable sense of keenness in all ranks. It is not intended that the battalion should become a fighting unit, if it did, it would be second to none in courage and efficiency.”

At the same time he referred to a new University Air Force Squadron, connected with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which undergraduates could join in anticipation of becoming air crew. Today’s students and faculty might be dismayed by his concluding words, “we have not been sufficiently aware of our duty; the universities have surrendered too easily to narrow-minded specialism and have reached a dangerous condition of becoming glorified trade-schools. This sense of defect is probably the most cogent of all the war-time lessons for university education.”²⁷

Early in 1942 Brig. W. W. Foster, Commanding Military District 12 at Regina wrote to the University on the question of what to do with students who were too young to be called up for service and/or were conscientious objectors. There is an unsigned (although likely written by President J. S. Thomson) reply of considerable length which sets out the courses open to the university. These were to offer alternative training related to the war effort and equal in amount of time to that required by students taking military training or to expel these students and refuse to admit anyone unwilling to take military training on the grounds of being a conscientious objector. The Saskatchewan National War Services Board, through their chairman Mr. Justice J. F. L. Estey, had earlier rejected the first

proposal and the University Solicitor considered that under the provisions of the University Act as it then stood to exclude students on the grounds of religious belief would not comply with the Act. Thus an amendment to the Act would be required. At the time of writing there were five students under callable age who refused training. Of these four were Mennonites and one a Doukhorbor. They were therefore liable to be called up for compulsory labour when they reached the age of 21. Throughout the year the question arose of exemptions for men who were technically enemy aliens (e.g. Hungarians). A sort of extension of this situation is noted in that by the fall term no student could be admitted to class without a Class Card thus ensuring registration for military training in the COTC.²⁸ At the same time Major H. H. Ferns, second in command of the COTC, noted that the unit was playing an active part not only in the university but also in the development of the Canadian Army (Active Force).²⁹

In March 1943 the COTC establishment was increased from 4 companies of 4 platoons to 6 companies of 4 platoons. The number of male students registered for military training (including Regina College) was over 1,300 with about 800 enrolled in the Auxiliary Battalion. More choices in the matter of military training became available in the 1943-1944 session. In addition to the COTC the University Air Training Corps (1943) and the University Naval Training Division (1942) came into being. Membership in any one of these would fulfill the requirements for compulsory training. Such training would be about six hours per week for a minimum of 110 hours per session and two weeks camp training at the close of the academic year. Specific requirements were set out for each of these training components.³⁰

The social side was not neglected and a Mess Dinner was held at the Bessborough Hotel on 27 February 1943. And another event of note in March was a donation, arranged by Lt.-Col. J. H. Thompson, of \$1,500.00 from the COTC for the proposed Memorial Union Building (MUB). This was the first contribution to this building project. Thompson was a member and trustee of the MUB Fund Committee.

A new feature for some members of the COTC was the “call-out” of several eligible members during the summer months as 2nd Lieutenants in such army components as Ordnance, Engineers and Signals. These men then reverted to cadet rank and status upon return to classes. As the year ended Lt.-Col. J. H. Thompson wrote a long letter to the President responding to questions raised by the Committee of Military Education about “reducing the monotony and repetition of COTC training and restoring the value allowed ... when a student enlists in the Active Force. This suggestion opens up the question of possible changes in University policy with respect to military training.” He was not in favour of granting ex-COTC members any privileges upon enlistment other than any warranted by their training nor did he recommend any reduction in their training from the point of view of the national interest and public relations of the university. He proposed four recommendations for the support of the Committee of Military Education. These were the need for discipline and some “dull detail”; counteracting the tendency to think of military preparation as unnecessary in the light of “the near approach of victory”; giving the cadet the wherewithal for earning promotion even though the almost automatic process of granting commissions to university graduates was practically eliminated and

obtaining from National Defence Headquarters a statement as to which credits might be granted students upon enlistment. Thompson then enlarged upon these points in considerable detail. He felt that the unit had shown exceptional mental training and interest. In the senior years courses were offered in Military German, Physiography, Military Chemistry and Explosives. He referred to some current thinking that due to Russian victories and the bombing of German cities the war would soon be over!

Thompson went on to say, “the general public tends to be uneasy concerning the real national need of postponement of military call-up of University students in the fifth year of war. It seems to me that this unease could turn into hostility towards the University if it became known that the small amount of military training now required of the students was being reduced because students regarded it as an imposition and a waste of time.” And further, “It is felt, however, that, due to the diversity of national origins in this province, an apparently high casualty rate among the men from this province ... public opinion here is very prone to seize upon the issue of military training at the University.” Finally he discussed problems with the commissioning of university men as opposed to those who had actual experience in the field and the army’s fairly firm commitment to commission officers only after non-commissioned service in the field. He concluded with a few remarks about the University Naval Training Detachment and the University Air Corps candidates and the commissioning process in those two services. Processes which were, in large part, dictated by the temporarily large number of losses which these services suffered.³¹

Early in 1944 Thompson also wrote to Lt.-Col. C. R. Hopper (commanding the University of Manitoba COTC) who had requested information on possible modifications to training. Thompson outlined the advice he and his officers had given the University, leaving it to the President “to write to you authoritatively.” He pointed out that the laid down 110 hours of local training per winter session were carried out for all students under 45 years of age and capable of standing the type of training offered. There were very few exemptions, namely medical students and those from the affiliated theological colleges. The medical course was a “telescoped” two year clinical programme which did not fit that of the COTC. It also included “military medicine.” The students from the affiliated theological colleges were not required by the university to take military training unless they were taking two or more Arts courses. Some graduate students permitted to proceed towards masters’ degrees and who assisted in university instruction were excused from military training.

Thompson went on to express some of his own ideas. Apparently there was some pressure from students and faculty in Engineering for a reduction in hours of training on the grounds that such training interfered with the academic training of the senior students. He rejected this idea, saying: “On the whole I do not think that the University is likely to regard it as good for either its own public relations or its influence upon the public attitude towards the war, to encourage the idea that the need for struggle is ended, by relaxing training requirements, especially when it does not appear that anything of a compensating value to the war effort would be gained.” Stronger pressure seemed to be in favour of greater variety and novelty in training especially after the first two years.

However the university did not have the equipment for advanced special training but tried to compensate by running classes in war science, tactics and other types of “Officer Candidate” training at the same time as maintaining efficiency in drill and physical conditioning.

Students and some faculty felt that much of military training was not “progressive.” He disagreed with this and expressed his view that the faculty should support the COTC. At the same time he indicated that those responsible for military training on the campus were “constantly on the look-out for means of making the advanced years progressive in development of command and in ‘officer type’ training.”³²

In July, 1944 a circular letter entitled “Enlistment (Enrolment) and Employment of Aliens and Naturalized Canadian Citizens in the Canadian Army” was published. This stated, in part, “Any student at a University who is ineligible for service in the Canadian Army, but who is required by the University to undergo military training, may receive such training with, but not in, the auxiliary training battalion or other similar formation connected with the University concerned. If no auxiliary battalion or corresponding formation exists at the University the training may be taken with, but not in, the COTC. It must be clearly understood that the Department of National Defence assumes no responsibility financial or otherwise, for such individuals.”³³

The students referred to were (a) nationals of enemy countries (except Japanese) who had not made a “Declaration of Intention” or who having been resident in Canada or the British Dominions for the requisite period, have not made application for naturalization; (b) Persons of Japanese racial origin, regardless of their present nationality. In effect this meant that under existing regulations such students would not be compensated for injuries or disabilities suffered during training. There were six such students training with the COTC (three Hungarians, one Austrian and two Japanese of Canadian nationality). While it was deemed very unlikely they might suffer injury or disease it was realized that they came within the purview of this new regulation.³⁴

In a follow-up letter Lt.-Col. Thompson suggested that these few students might sign a waiver absolving the university of responsibility for any future claims arising from military service or, if that were not possible then they could be exempt as were theological students. Then they could train on a voluntary basis at their own risk.³⁵

Five months later came the surrender of Germany closely followed, in August, by the surrender of Japan and the subsequent arrival of veterans on the campus. In a report prepared for *The Green and White* by Professor H. H. Ferns, Veterans’ Adviser in Studies, it is noted that 1,045 veterans were in attendance, 28 of them were women.³⁶

Thompson’s command came to an end 21 March 1947 having served with the COTC since 1921 (with the exception of Active Service in Regina from 1939 to 1940). Born in Nottingham, England, he had received his early education in Saskatoon. Enlisting for service in the Great War, he joined the RAF overseas. Badly injured in a crash he lost the sight of one eye and the other was seriously impaired. He later became an accountant with his own practice in Saskatoon until 1938 when he became an accounting instructor at

the university. Thompson became dean of the College of Commerce in May 1940.³⁷ When he took command he became the successor to C. J. Mackenzie, A. E. Potts and R. A. Spencer. During his time from the large number of students who took COTC training some 90% joined the army and were commissioned. "The value of the military training which they had received while attending the university in the COTC ... was thus demonstrated."³⁸

Toward the end of Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson's command a new element was introduced to the training programme with the appointment of a Resident Staff Officer in the person of Major George Streb, Royal Canadian Signals. Streb, originally from Saskatoon, had joined the permanent force signals upon graduation from the College of Engineering in 1933. With his arrival the unit took on a new face and there was a definite "lift" in enthusiasm and interest.

When Thompson retired³⁹ command was assumed by Lt.-Col. J. S. M. Allely, an associate professor of economics, who had first been commissioned in 1929 at Queen's University. He came to Saskatoon in 1939 and was appointed adjutant of the COTC. In 1942 he joined the Active Service Force serving in Ottawa in the Adjutant General's Branch and the General Staff. He was then seconded to the British Army to serve as the Senior Finance Officer of the Control Commission for Germany (British Element) from 1944 to 1946 as a lieutenant-colonel. He returned to the University, commanding the COTC from 1947 to 1957.

In 1947, a draft article or press release noted that:

In the post war reorganization of the Canadian Army the COTC has been given the very important task of preliminary selection and partial training of a large proportion of the army's officers. Under this scheme a limited number of potential officers are selected for a three year COTC course from among applicants in the first or second year of University. During the winter they are given short courses in Military Science, Military History, Military Geography and Economics of Defence, designed not to interfere unduly with their University work. In the summers they are given 16 weeks practical training per summer, with pay, at Corps Schools in all branches of the army situated all across Canada. The successful candidates, on completion of the course, may be accepted for commissions in the Active Army. If they do not wish to join the Active Army or if no vacancy exists, they are expected to serve as officers in the Reserve Army, or in the Supplementary Reserve. The University of Saskatchewan Contingent has been given a quota of 150 officer cadetships ... this permits the admission of approximately 50 cadets per year ... one year's training under the new scheme has been completed.⁴⁰

It was at this time that several members of the unit began to think seriously about being commissioned in Canada's "new army."

In February of 1946 the Chief of the General Staff, Lt.-Gen Charles Foulkes, submitted a plan for the provision of officers for the army to the Defence Minister (Douglas Abbott). His aim was to "get the highest possible competence in economic, political and technical subjects, as well as in purely military matters and in order to maintain homogeneity in the officer corps, regular army officers should almost all be educated in the universities. He

had therefore asked Dr. James Thomson, the President of the University of Saskatchewan and President of the National Conference of Universities, to show how the universities could give academic credit for certain subjects that had a military application.” And further “he also anticipated that the new plan would attract a better type of student than the COTC.”⁴¹ This was perhaps not the most complimentary comment about the COTC! Nonetheless cadets from most Canadian universities did indeed train for the better part of three summers. Those who were newly commissioned in the Regular Force spent the summer of 1949 at RMC (which had re-opened in 1948 to educate cadets for four years on a tri-service basis)⁴² on a Common to All Arms course which appeared to have as its aim the “polishing” of these new officers in matters of dress, drill, manners and deportment as well as developing at least an acquaintance with the roles, practices and traditions of their brothers in arms. Various senior officers from Army Headquarters addressed them on the tasks assigned to their own arms and services. “Effective speaking” was a highlight and a useful one at that. The whole thing was referred to in some circles as a “couth course”!⁴³ The Department of National Defence now created a new Regular Officers Training Plan (ROTP), “a scheme that paid all education costs in what were now called the Canadian Services Colleges or at a university in return for a commitment of three years service after graduation.”⁴⁴ Henceforth the annual reports submitted by the commanding officers of the COTC to the successive presidents of the University reflect these changes in training and military education.

At the same time there were a few personnel changes in the unit. Major Streb, the Resident Staff Officer, was replaced in December 1948 by Major T. de Faye, an infantryman. He in turn was replaced in January 1951 by Major W. M. Oxley of the Royal Canadian Signals.⁴⁵ During the short interval between these two postings Capt. Jack Summers of the College of Pharmacy was appointed acting Resident Staff Officer. 1951 also saw the retirement of Major H. H. Ferns from his long standing tour of duty as second in-command of the unit.⁴⁶

Annual reports submitted to the Presidents by the Commanding Officers over the next few years show statistics of enrolment and release and comment, albeit briefly, on successes and failures.⁴⁷ In 1951 it was noted that training had been extended to 20 weeks which was a financial help to some. The following year there was an exceptionally low rate of failure but recruiting had been disappointing. More lucrative employment was available and it appeared that the other services were more appealing with “publicity, uniforms and glamour.” The pattern repeated itself in 1953 in spite of some unspecified attempts so improve morale.

In 1954 Lieutenant-Colonel Allely noted in the report for that year, “It is believed, although the belief is based on little more than impressionistic sampling, that those accepted for training in this contingent from 1946-50 (i.e. the last training period completed in 1952) approximately 20% have served in the Active or Special Forces and perhaps an additional 30% have served in the Reserve Force.”⁴⁸ Recruiting was again disappointing.

By 1955 wastage was declining, probably due to better selection processes being in place. Most failures were due to academic failure or family and personal problems. During the summer months fifty-one lieutenants and officer cadets were attached to Corps Schools and Regular Force units. The next two years (1956-57) saw a lower wastage rate but also fewer applications. There were no applications from Regina (Luther, Campion and St. Chad).

1957 saw several changes in the make-up and administration of the contingent. Major R. J. G. Wecker, who had been the Resident Staff Officer for the past three years, was replaced on 9 September by Major E. B. McCorkell. McCorkell's was to be the last such appointment and the unit was advised that the Resident Staff Officer and staff would be withdrawn at the end of the academic year and there would not be any more such appointments. On 7 December Lt.-Col. Norman Cram⁴⁹ assumed command for the next two years from Lieutenant-Colonel Allely. At the same time the unit was re-organized into a contingent HQ and 3 Training Companies. The second in-command was Major John Joyce and the three company commanders were Capt W. B. McCoy, Major H. H. Edmunds and Lt. M. C. de la Gorgiendiere.

The 1958/59 report made recommendations for training, administration, logistics and recruiting. More flexibility in training was needed especially in the third year including the use of outside lecturers. Administrative assistance was needed in the spring when university staff members and officers were especially busy. The recruiting campaign would be enhanced.

Yet another change of command occurred 1 January 1960 from Lt.-Col. Norman Cram to Lt.-Col. J. Summers, M.C., who had served previously as the acting Resident Staff Officer. Summers, who was commissioned in 1942, had served during the war with the South Alberta Rifles and was awarded the Military Cross just prior to the end of the war. He studied pharmacy at the university and graduated in 1949. He joined the militia after leaving the Active Force and among other appointments served as adjutant in the COTC.⁵⁰ During his six-year command of the COTC a small increase in numbers was noted at first: 1959 - 48 all ranks, 1960 - 50, 1961 - 51, 1962/63 - 66. Then recruiting was cancelled in December 1963. Summers' annual report for 1964-65 listed seven COTC cadets (Reserve) and 15 ROTP cadets (Regular), explaining that "the low enrolment figure for COTC cadets reflects the armed services austerity program of 1963-64 when the unit was not permitted to enlist recruits. A new policy which restricts the training of COTC cadets to two years has also reduced the number of cadets on the strength of the unit."⁵¹ At the same time the training was integrated with the university's naval and air force units. Joint parades and tri-service training periods were carried out and the contingent officers felt it was reasonable and practical to develop a tri-service unit. This was in fact initiated and carried out during the 1965-66 training year when there were sixteen COTC and fifteen ROTP cadets.

The "axe fell" at the end of the 1966-67 training year. By this time Summers had been replaced as the Commanding Officer of the contingent by Lt.-Col. A. G. Pettigrew on 1 September 1967.⁵² In his annual report (the last) Pettigrew stated, "This year marks the

end of a long tradition at our University; the end of the Canadian Officer Training Corps, unfortunately the victim of economic pressure. The Federal Government decided to discontinue all three Officer Cadet training programmes, on a national basis, effective 30 April 1968. During its long career the University of Saskatchewan Contingent, Canadian Officers Training Corps, has served our country well and its graduates have been a credit to their Service and their University.”⁵³



“The Old Guard”:
Professors Allely
(Economics),
Bateman
(Philosophy),
Austensen (Classics),
Edmunds (Geology),
Ferns (Mathematics),
Mawdsley (Geology),
and Thompson
(Commerce). From
COTC funds

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NOTES

Image on first page: Members of the Canadian Officers Training Corps march through the University Gates, April 1941 (COTC fonds).

¹ Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1985), p. 226.

² W. P. Thompson, *The University of Saskatchewan, A Personal History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 134. It should be noted there were three Thom[p]sons at the university at the same time. The second President was James Sutherland Thomson (without the “p”), irreverently known as “Butch”; the Dean of Arts and Science (who became the third President) was Walter Palmer Thompson and the Dean of Accounting (later Commerce) was Joseph H. Thompson, better known as “Little Joe.”

³ J. S. Thomson, “University of Saskatchewan Contingent, COTC,” 7 December 1946, President’s Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC.

⁴ R. W. Brock, “History of the 196th Battalion,” *WUB* (21 October 1916).

⁵ Major F. W. Brown, “History of the 196th Battalion,” *WUB* 1, 1 (21 October 1916).

⁶ “History of B Company,” *WUB* 1, 1 (21 October 1916).

⁷ “1916: The Western Universities Battalion,” *Events In The History of the University of Saskatchewan*, http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/uofs_events/articles/1916.php

⁸ Michael Hayden, *Seeking A Balance* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), p. 83.

⁹ W. P. Thompson, *The University of Saskatchewan, A Personal History*, p. 99.

¹⁰ A/President to Director of War Trophies, Ottawa, 16 December 1919, President’s Office fonds, series I (Walter C. Murray), file B73, Military Matters.

¹¹ Patrick Hayes, “Biplane disappearance mystery solved,” *On Campus News* 8, 3.

¹² A.A. & Q.M.G, Military District 12, Regina to A/President Ling, 2 January 1920, President’s Office fonds, series I (Walter C. Murray), file B73, Military Matters.

¹³ “University of Saskatchewan. Contingent COTC.”, 7 December 1946, President’s Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file 35(3).

¹⁴ Murray to Logan, 21 June 1921, President’s Office fonds, series I (Walter C. Murray), file B73, Military Matters.

¹⁵ COTC Annual Reports 1924-1925, 1925-1916 and 1928-1919.

¹⁶ *Star Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 21 May 1942.

¹⁷ *Star Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 6 November 1982, 27 September 1982 and 6 September 1983.

¹⁸ *Canada At War and Peace*, vol. II (Ottawa: Esprit de Corps Books, 2nd ed.), p. 54.

¹⁹ *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 1 October 1983.

²⁰ *Whig Standard*, Kingston, 3 September 1983. Potts’ three sons also served in the army. Robert, the eldest, graduated from R.M.C., served overseas with the Princess Patricia’s, his father’s old regiment, earned a D.S.O. and after completing an engineering degree at the University of Saskatchewan served in the regular army until killed in a cat/train accident in Chilliwack, B.C. Twin sons, Arthur and Joseph both served in the army during the latter part of the war. Arthur later became a lieutenant-colonel and commanded the Princess Patricias while Joseph, a lawyer, became a judge of the Supreme Court of Ontario.

²¹ J. S. Thomson to Brig. Russell, M.D. 12, Regina, 19 October 1939, President’s Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC; *Star-Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 29 September 1939, “Heaviest Enrolment in COTC History”; *Sheaf*, 5 October 1942, “COTC Plays Active Part in Supplying Officers” and “Special Trainee Group for Active Service.”

²² Thomson to Russell, 5 December 1939, President’s Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC.

²³ *Star Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 9 May 1940. Thompson, born in England, received his early education in Saskatoon and enlisted for service in the Great War. Joining the RAF he was badly injured in a crash, losing the sight of one eye, the sight in the other was seriously impaired.

²⁴ President’s Office fonds, Series II (J. S. Thomson), file B104(1), Military Training (1939-42), n.d.

²⁵ President J. S. Thomson to Hon. J. L. Ralston, 13 September 1940, President’s Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B104, Military Training.

²⁶ *The Green and White*, December 1940.

²⁷ *The Green and White*, December 1941.

²⁸ Letter, University Committee on Discipline to District Officer Commanding, M.D. 12, Regina, January

1942, President's Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B104, Military Training.

²⁹ *Star Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 5 October 1942.

³⁰ *Star Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 10 August 1943.

³¹ Lt.-Col. J. H. Thompson to President J. S. Thomson, 29 December 1943, President's Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC.

³² Lt.-Col. J. H. Thompson to Lt.-Col. C. R. Hopper, Commanding University of Manitoba, COTC, 11 Feb 1944. President's Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC.

³³ District HQ (Regina) Circular Letter 150, 8 July 1944, quoted in letter from J. H. Thompson to J. S. Thomson, 2 December 1944, President's Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC.

³⁴ Lt.-Col. J. H. Thompson to President J. S. Thomson, 2 December 1944, President's Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 December 1944.

³⁶ Prof. H. H. Ferns, "Veterans at Saskatchewan," *The Green and White*, October 1945, p. 1.

³⁷ *Star Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 9 May 1940 & 10 March 1952.

³⁸ W. P. Thompson, *The University of Saskatchewan, A Personal History*, pp. 132-133.

³⁹ *Star Phoenix*, Saskatoon, 10 March 1952. Thompson died very suddenly on 9 March 1952 at 55 years of age. In addition to being Dean of Commerce he was chairman of the Board of Governors of Emmanuel College. He had retained his military affiliations as aide-de-camp to lieutenant-governors J. M. Ulrich and William J. Patterson and was also the Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel of the COTC.

⁴⁰ President J. S. Thomson, press release (or draft article), untitled, 1947, President's Office fonds, series II (J. S. Thomson), file B35, COTC.

⁴¹ Richard Arthur Preston, *RMC, A History of The Royal Military College* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 312.

⁴² J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army, Waging the War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 317.

⁴³ Four of these officers (including the author of this paper) were from the University of Saskatchewan Contingent.

⁴⁴ J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p. 317.

⁴⁵ *Sheaf*, 16 January 1951.

⁴⁶ Ferns was perhaps better known for his work as the Veterans Advisor in Studies where he was noted for his great kindness (almost "fatherly") to returning veterans. He made many "rough places smooth."

⁴⁷ COTC Annual Reports 1951-1959.

⁴⁸ COTC Annual Report 1954.

⁴⁹ Capt. Norman Cram (BA '41, BED '51) was one of the veterans returning to the campus in 1945. He served as a part-time mathematics instructor and in the Campus Veterans Advisor's Office. He remained very active in local and university sports especially university basketball. Cram became Assistant Registrar in 1949, was Registrar from 1950 until 1968, Campus Secretary from 1968 to 1974, and University Secretary from 1974 to 1984. He commanded the COTC from 7 January 1957 until 1 January 1960.

⁵⁰ Summers became a Professor of Pharmacy at the university and at the same time continued serving in the militia. In 1967 he was appointed as the militia commander of Saskatchewan District. Noted for his collection of some 2,500 lead soldiers he co-authored (with René Chartrand) an illustrated book, *Military Uniforms in Canada 1665-1970*. He retired as assistant dean of Pharmacy in 1987 and died in 1994.

⁵¹ COTC Annual Report 1964-65.

⁵² Pettigrew had been a member of the ROTP from 1954 to 1958. He fulfilled his contract serving in the Regular Army until 1961 in the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps for 1 year in 16 Regional Ordnance Depot, Winnipeg and 2 years with the Ordnance Field Park, 4 Canadian Infantry Brigade in Germany. Returning to the university he held several appointments as Internal Auditor and Systems Analyst for 13 years then as Business Manager (Saskatoon Campus) until 1974 when he left to go into private business. He worked with the Federal Dept. of Regional and Economic Expansion then with SED Systems from 1976 to 81 as Vice President Finance and Administration and retiring as Executive Vice President. He then went in to private business with Key Lake Mining from 1982-88 then with CAMECO from 1989-1995 as Vice President Human Resources.

⁵³ COTC Annual Report 1967-68.