

RETROSPECT

Texas Tech and America's Greatest Generation

By Jim Ginther, Archivist, Southwest Collection

Tom Brokaw called them the greatest generation, that group of Americans molded by their experience with the Great Depression and World War II. What was unique about them, he suggests, was that they were united not only by a common purpose, but also by common values—duty, honor, economy, courage, service, love of family and country, and, above all, responsibility for oneself.

Texas Tech University came of age in this same period and during the Second World War demonstrated some of these same values by participating in an experimental Army Air Force training program recognized on campus as the 309th Training Detachment.

Tech's commitment to military training dates back to the origins of the university and is written into the legislation that created it. Its interest in aviation goes back almost as far. Both are illustrated in a letter sent by university president Paul A. Horn to the Eighth Army Corps Headquarters at Fort Sam Houston in 1930. In it he proposed the location of an

ROTC students participate in drills on campus.

aviation ground school at the university as part of a request for a campus Army ROTC unit. This proposal was turned down. Nonetheless, interest in service to the nation remained strong among the students and faculty. Many served in the Texas National Guard detachment based on campus and took classes in the University's military science department. Eventually, Tech got an Army ROTC engineering unit in 1936.

However, it was only open to engineering majors, and university administrators, responding to student interest, continued to lobby for yet another ROTC unit that all interested male students could join.

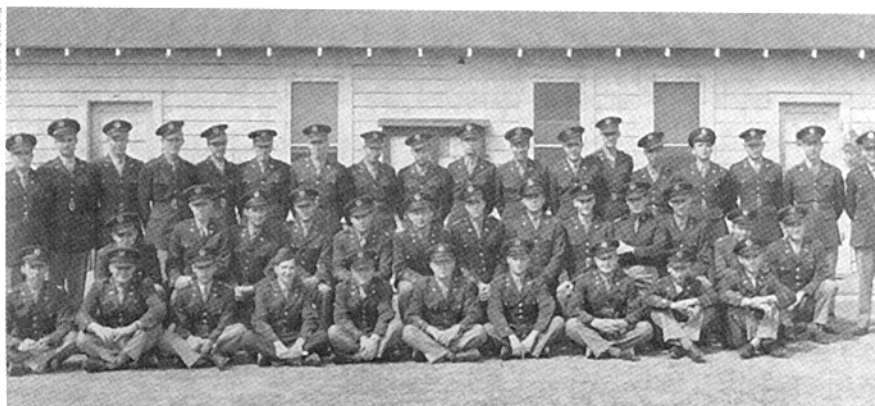
On Dec. 7, 1941, in the wake of the

bombing of Pearl Harbor, university president Clifford B. Jones, expressing both his own mood and that of the campus, wrote the War Department offering use the university's facilities to support the war effort. No action was taken on this offer, however, until Dec. 11, 1942, when the War Manpower Commission contacted the university while conducting a survey to determine which of the nation's campuses might be able to provide training for the military in technical fields considered essential to the national interest. Dr. H. L. Kent, administrative assistant to Jones, provided the commission with information regarding university personnel and facilities and followed this up with a lobbying visit to Washington, D.C.

In January 1943 the commanding officer of Lubbock Army Air Field inspected the campus to determine its ability to support an aircrew-training program. He reported that the attitude of students and faculty as well as its facilities and proximity to civilian flying fields made the campus a highly suitable location for such a program which could handle 1250 trainees. On Feb. 19, 1943 the



1944, Lo Ventano



1943, Lo Ventano

Senior members of ROTC in front of the Military Science Building

Army sent Jones a letter stating its intent to open an aircrew college training program at Texas Tech. On Feb. 27, the first group of trainees arrived from Sheppard Field, Texas, and was designated the 309th College Training Detachment.

The goal of the College Training Program was to eliminate the variances in each recruit's previous schooling by establishing a baseline educational level for aircrew trainees. The Army made clear that the program was not expected to approximate a full college education. Rather it was to provide the students with as much learning as possible, in the time available, applicable to the complexities of operating military aircraft. The program had four basic educational components: academic, physical, military, and flight training. Classes in the

(right) *Students learn to maneuver under barbed wire.*

(below left) *Students check the communications system used for signaling.*



blows by on the spring breezes." All of this, the yearbook claimed, made the students "the kind of officers for which the Air Corps is searching, consequently, we never gripe." The yearbook also noted that in addition to the scheduled academics, many of the students "indulged in other scientific researches. Amazed at the bebies of beautiful Texas girls, they set out to make thorough survey of the situation. Most of them were successful." Other forms of diversion included baseball, volleyball, basketball, and football games.

The Civilian Training Program was in operation at Texas Tech from May 1, 1943, until April 30, 1944. During that period, 5,320 students entered the program, 3994 were graduated, 85 washed out, and 582 were transferred out in response to manpower pressures created by the final Allied offensive in Europe which was launched in April 1944. The remaining students were assigned to ground units of the infantry and Army Air Forces when the program was shut down. Brigadier General Martin F. Scanlon, commanding the Army Air

Forces Western Flying Training Command, wrote Clifford B. Jones commending the University's efforts, noting "The spirit of cooperation and teamwork which you have demonstrated under these circumstances have made the College Training Program an outstanding success... I desire that you and your faculty claim your just share of the credit for the present successes of our combat air forces."

The College Training Program at Texas Tech was a success. It made possible the acceleration of training in the Army Air Forces by ensuring a certain baseline educational standard among air crewmen, weeding out those incapable of being trained in this specialty, and reducing the need for basic remedial education once trainees were admitted to Army Air Force schools. In the process the program allowed the university, its faculty, and staff to play a part in the war effort and demonstrate its commitment to the values that defined America's greatest generation. ■

An outdoor class



first two areas were offered by University faculty and adjunct instructors, the third by Army officers and the fourth at local commercial flying fields by the Clent Breedlove Aerial Service.

Completion of the program took 21 weeks, with the last four reserved for flight training. Texas Tech faculty members from each of the departments concerned developed the courses for the academic portion of the program. Among these were J. N. Michie, C.C. Schmidt, Leroy T. Patton, W. B. Gates, and William Curry Holden. Classes were held in the Agriculture Building, labs in the Chemistry Building, and West and Sneed Halls were designated as barracks.

Despite the heavy workload, a trainee's life was not completely dominated by class work. Like all military units, the 309th established its own traditions which, according to the yearbook of class 43-C-18, included: the four-mile run, physical torture, drill, guard duty, reveille at 0600, and "parades as Texas



Peter W. Cawthon: Legendary Football Coach

By Albert Camp, Librarian, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library



On Nov. 1, 1975, 65 middle-aged men met at the Lubbock Hilton Inn. These men all had one thing in common—they had played football at Texas Tech between the years of 1930

and 1941. They met to honor a man they called “Coacher,” the man who coached the Texas Tech football team during those years. That man was Pete Cawthon.

Peter Willis Cawthon was barely 32 when he came to Texas Tech in April 1930, and if you can believe it, winning football games was a secondary reason for his selection. His primary mission was to bring order and discipline to a group of rowdy, unruly players. He accomplished both tasks, however, and in a very short time. At the end of the 1932 season, Tech stood as the highest scoring team in the nation with a total of 409 points for the season. The caliber of teams Tech faced improved dramatically during Cawthon’s reign—Michigan, Arizona, Montana, not “Canyon Normal,” as Cawthon was wont to say—and more often than not, Tech won. In 1938, Texas Tech was the only undefeated team in the nation in regular season play.

With regard to making the players into proper gentlemen, Cawthon was concerned with everything from table manners (“I’m not about to take you all on the road and into some nice restaurant and you all eat like a bunch of starvin’ shoats”) to their immortal souls (two buses drew up every Sunday morning to the athletic dormitory, and the players were expected to be either on the one for Sunday school or the one

for church). To his teams, Cawthon was a combination of coach, father-figure, mentor, confidante, friend.

Cawthon’s record at Tech would lead one to believe that his accomplishments left little time for anything other than football and his team. He did, however, contribute significantly in other ways to both Tech and the community. He took a prominent role in planting trees and beautifying Tech’s campus. His coaching clinics drew national audiences and attention to both Tech and Lubbock with instructors such as Knute Rockne and Pop Warner. With the help of the Kiwanis Club, Cawthon organized the Knothole Gang to keep young boys busy and out of trouble in their spare time. He taught a men’s Bible class on Sundays. Unasked, he donated used but usable equipment to the Dunbar High School athletic teams because they had none, and he arranged for them to use playing fields even if he had to hold his own practices on the open prairie. He even started a fund to build a synagogue in

Lubbock so a Jewish player would have somewhere to worship on the Sabbath. He was a devoted husband and father. The range of Cawthon’s interests and accomplishments is amazing.

Cawthon’s detractors, and there were such, said that he won at the expense of sportsmanship, that he was a tyrannical disciplinarian, that he beat and cursed his players. All of these charges are refuted by the men who played for him. But that he was strict with his players was undeniable. He ran them until they were almost beyond going and then demanded more. He berated them unmercifully for errors. He had strict rules for conduct both on and off the field, and rarely did a player get a second chance if those rules were broken. He had a quick temper and sometimes was unable to control it. He was frequently at odds with the Athletic Council. And he was a terrible loser, communicating his gloom to everyone he encountered and often disappearing for a few days

or even a week after a defeat. But he also inspired loyalty and devotion in the men he coached to an unusual degree. He taught them more about life than about football. The friendships he developed lasted a lifetime.

Colorful, flamboyant and controversial, Pete Cawthon was a man no one could forget. The invitation the former players received in 1975 carried the advice to: “Get your stories polished and be ready to join with others of ‘Pete’s boys’ in placing on tape your favorite recollections.” They did so, and the resulting tapes reside safely in the Oral History Collection of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, along with the recorded memories of many other friends and acquaintances of Pete Cawthon. ■



From the sidelines, Coach Pete Cawthon (left) made his players want to win.