

A Proud 50-Year Legacy By: 2LT James Biggar



The year was 1952. World War II veterans were busily pursuing careers and raising young children. *Singing in the Rain* was a box office hit. After being down 3 games to 2, the Yankees would prevail over the Brooklyn Dodgers and win the World Series. Perhaps most importantly, American soldiers were fully entrenched in the Korean war.

It was also in 1952 that General Order #121 instituted Army ROTC at Eastern Washington College of Education. And last fall, the Department of Military Science at Eastern Washington University began its "50 Years of ROTC at Eastern" celebration by hosting a reunion of ROTC Alumni from the first commissioning class in 1955 to present.

The establishment of ROTC at Eastern was based on a request by college officials and, as with all ROTC detachments at that time, all qualified males had to attend two years of mandatory military training. The first Army ROTC classes began at Eastern in September 1952 with an enrollment of 166 cadets. But within a dozen short years, the size of the Cadet Corps at Eastern would grow to more than 800 students per year, with the number of commissioned officers increasing to over 70 each year.

In line with a nationwide move, Army ROTC at Eastern was made a voluntary program in 1969. The number of cadets commissioned as officers began to decline to about 20 commissionees during the 1973-74 school year.

By late 1980, Eastern's Military Science Department was asked to be the host institution for an "expand the base" ROTC program at Central Washington University in Ellensburg. A few years later the detachment at CWU became its own entity.

Other programs conducted in the years when enrollment figures were higher included military drill teams and a military drum and bugle corps. Another integral part of the cadet corps during that time was the Sponsor Corps, made up of young women who participated in drills, parades and served as hostesses at selected university functions. With a subsequent decline in enrollment and the overall integration of women into the ROTC program, these organizations were eventually phased out.

In May 1970, a significant incident occurred at Eastern which reflected the temperament of college students of the time. In response to the unfortunate incident at Kent State University, Ohio on May 4, 1970, a group of



distraught students approached Cadet Hall with the idea of occupying the building and protesting the presence of the military on campus.

The professor of military science at that time was Colonel Andy Pribnow. He met the leaders of the protest at the entrance and through rational discussion was able to keep the situation at bay. Colonel Pribnow was assisted by the university's baseball and track teams. As some of the protestors moved toward the flag pole to take the U.S. Flag,

members of the athletic squads moved in, protected the pole, and restored order. The group of protestors left the area at this point. This represented the only incident of overt student protest toward the military at Eastern, and the student body has accepted and tolerated the military and ROTC through the years which followed.

The 50th reunion of ROTC, which was organized and hosted by Eastern graduate and 2001 ROTC commissionee 2nd Lt. James Biggar, included seven guest alumni speakers from years 1955, 56, 58, 65, 75, 81 and 2001, culminating with an emotionally reminiscent and historically informative 45-minute multi-media presentation.

Among the guests were Richard Edwards, a 1955 ROTC commissionee and current owner of Inland Roofing & Supply Inc. in Spokane; COL (R) Tom Talkington, a 1958 ROTC commissionee, Vietnam Veteran and former cadre member of Eastern's ROTC; Billie Jean Hall, a 1975 Eastern graduate, former member of Eastern's Sponsor Corps, and currently the senior admissions advisor at EWU; and LTC Allen Abbott, a 1981 ROTC commissionee and current commander of 1/303rd Armor Battalion in the Washington Army National Guard.

The guest alumni spoke of their experiences as cadets and students while attending Eastern. They also shared their memories and opinions of military life, often with dramatic flare.

Several of the guest alumni speakers were proud veterans of the Vietnam War and stressed the importance of duty, honor and an obligation for the young men and women of our country to continue to fight for the freedoms that made this country great.

The *50 Years of ROTC at Eastern Washington University* celebration will continue through the remainder of winter and spring quarters and culminate with this June's Commissioning Ceremony at Showalter Hall.

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