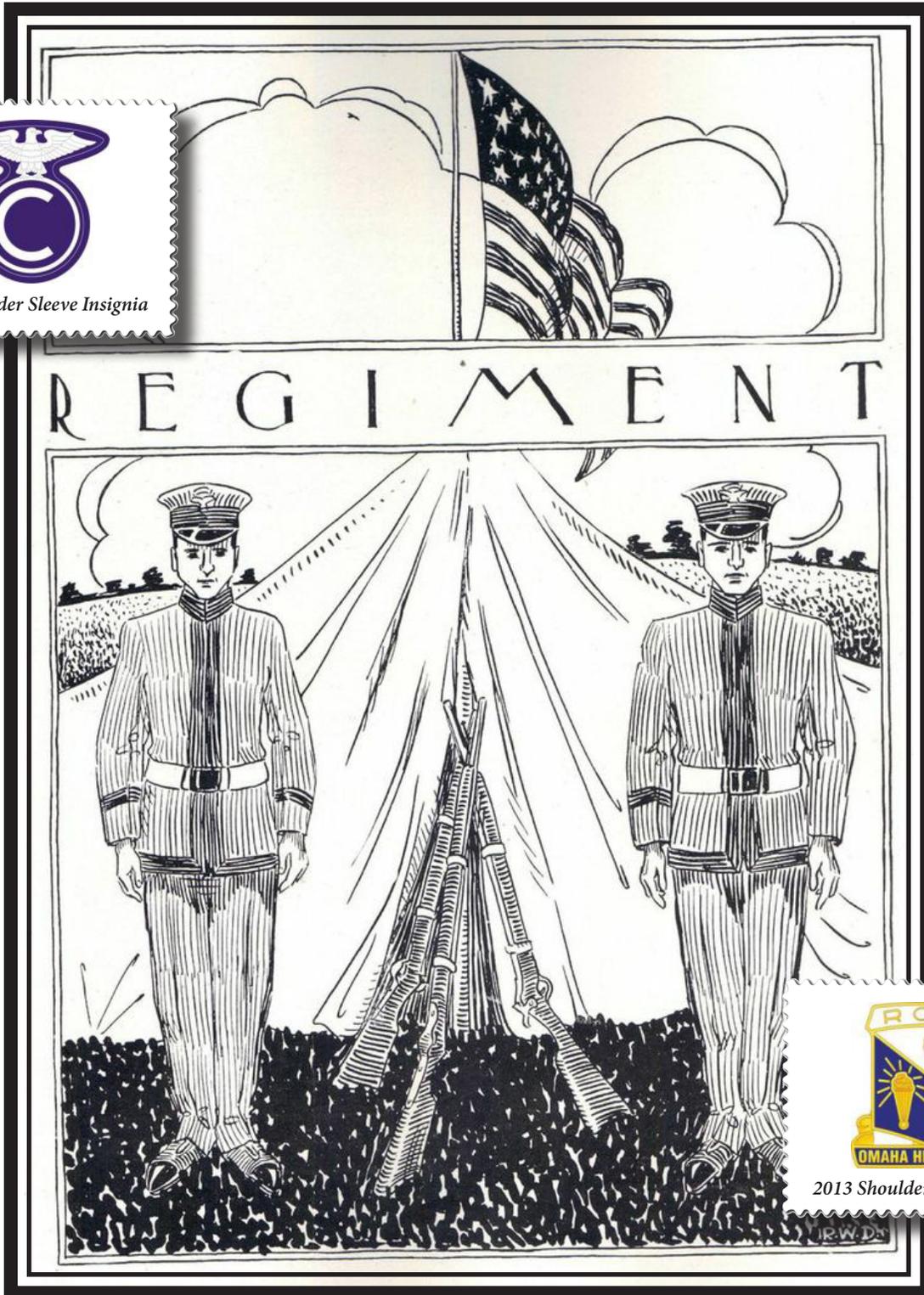


The Eagle Battalion



2013 Shoulder Sleeve Insignia



2013 Shoulder Loop Insignia

Original artwork by the 1914 *O-Book* staff that served as the title page for a section detailing the 1914 Central High School Student Regiment.

**JROTC at Omaha Central High School
1887 to Present**

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Today, the organization asserts several objectives in its mission and purpose statements. Enrolled students would learn leadership fundamentals, self-reliance, requirements of national security, discipline, oral and written communications, and the responsibilities of citizens. These goals plus its military science dimensions attracted many young men to the JROTC, usually referred to as the ROTC. Among the reasons for joining was that it was an alternative to physical education.

History

Omaha High School initiated the school's first military organization when student William J. Broatch organized a Military Company in 1887 for students interested in guns and soldiers to meet and drill once a week. His effort failed the next year with the graduation of its seniors and as a result of several accidents during a sham battle. Omaha High's name was changed to Omaha Central in the 1911-12 years to differentiate it from a new second high school. In the spring of 1892 the school's newspaper, the Register, advised the formation of a Cadet Company and on May 4th a meeting was held to consider such a Company. A committee was charged to write a constitution with approvals soon following, and a Military Company was established in 1893. In the beginning participation was voluntary but later became mandatory.

Congressman D. H. Mercer in October 1892 introduced a bill in Congress for the appointment of an officer from Fort Omaha as military instructor assigned to drill "the boys." The bill passed with authorization to organize and train students in military topics. Under the leadership of Broatch an Omaha High School Military Company had Cadets for the 1893 school year. Civil War muskets and bayonets were acquired by Broatch for the unit's armaments from the Thurston Rifles, a unit of the First Nebraska Infantry. About half of the students were armed and all were without uniforms, but later military caps were made available to the Cadets. Discussion of cheap blouses took place in 1897 and steps were to be taken to ascertain the cost of their acquisition. At the turn of the century uniforms were available to Cadets who could afford them, for in these early years the Military Company was a private effort, and participants were responsible for costs. During the years 1899 and 1901 a non-uniform Company was designated for students unable to afford a uniform.

With the 1916 National Defense Act the program came under Federal jurisdiction and eventually named the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. Expanded in the mid-1960s the Act provided that retired officers would replace active duty officers in JROTC assignments, working with the schools to share costs. Over the years Regiment has alternated with Battalion and Brigade as names for the units.

Omaha Central's military program in 1935 became the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. In 1937 what had previously been a private Regiment was now government sponsored with participation voluntary. Parents no longer had to buy their son's uniform and a requirement was imposed that a school's JROTC must maintain a one hundred minimum JROTC enrollment over fourteen years to remain active. The blue gray uniforms of the Civil War period and those of West Point Cadets were replaced by the olive drab of the army. Cadets currently wear army issue cloth caps and blue berets.

Discipline

Early regulations issued in the formation of the Military Company required the manual of arms to be practiced until the men were ready to “march down stairs.” Silence was required in the ranks and discipline was important in the program’s goals. In 1887 it was decided to establish an Awkward Squad. Cadets who misbehaved or were inattentive would be assigned to the Squad and ordered to report after school every Wednesday for drill. The same year any Cadet who was disobedient or who was disorderly in falling in or during a parade could result in being expelled.

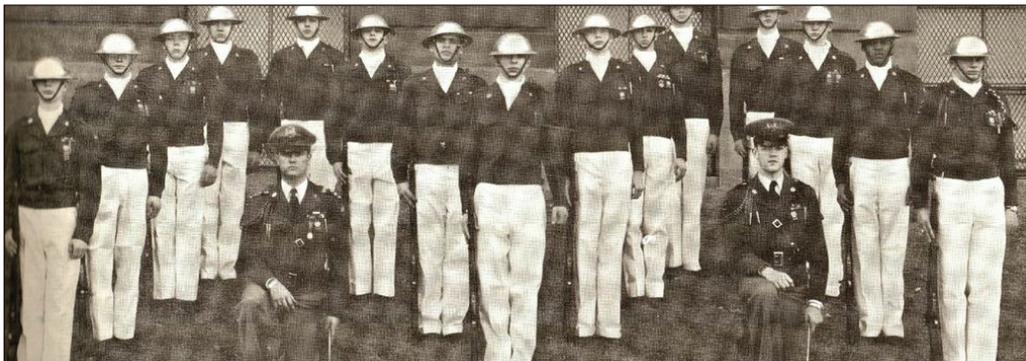
Special Units



**Photo courtesy of 1940 O-Book
1940 ROTC Band of Omaha Central High School.**

Decorated with flags and bunting, the drill hall was on the fourth floor of the Central building. In addition to the original Companies (A, B, C, and D), Company E was added in 1893 accompanied by a motto: “We’re not a very tall gang, But we’re always in a hurry; Napoleon was a small man. Therefore we need not hurry.” Company A’s shout was “Squad right; Company A is out of sight. AAA!”

Over time several other units were added, responsible for specialized tasks; a Band took its place on the parade grounds; a Hospital Corps to bandage and tend Cadets “wounded” in sham battles; a Signal Corps Squad for communication purposes; a Courtesy Patrol to greet students, guests and faculty; a Rifle Team for sharpshooters; a Military Police unit to maintain order at football games and other events; and Engineers to oversee equipment.



**Photo courtesy of 1955 O-Book
1955 Crack Squad of Omaha Central High School.**

A Crack Squad and a Silent Platoon for many years exemplified precision drilling. Performing its intricate movements in silence, the Silent Platoon of less than twenty Cadets lived up to its name, flawlessly executing its close order drills without oral commands. A Crack Squad of some sixteen Cadets, also without oral commands, performed with military precision, spinning their silver barreled rifles. The members wore white trousers, brown army blouses with white belts, highly polished buttons and shoes, and World War 1 silver shining helmets. They displayed their skills before civic groups and on occasion the Shrine Circus. The successor to the Crack Squad and the Silent Platoon is the Co-ed Drill Team, and also a female team when there is sufficient interest. Fielding an exhibition team with rifles is an available option.

During AK-SAR-BEN'S annual Ball, Central Cadets as Hussars were courtly escorts for the Kings and Queens. Selected in September on the basis of height, posture, and marching ability, the Hussars practiced and perfected their coordinated marching and stately drill routines. Their uniforms for the evening were regal flashy white for the Kings and red and green for the Queens.

Commissioned Officers Club



Photo courtesy of 1955 *O-Book*
1955 Commissioned Officer's Club of Omaha Central High School.

To oversee these units and entities in 1895 the Cadet Officers Club was founded and later called the Commissioned Officers Club. Originally intended to provide for officer interactions, it evolved into the body that passed upon almost all matters pertaining to the military. It once adopted a rule that Cadets could not smoke while in uniform.

Summer Camp

An annual summer camp was instituted in the early years of the Regiment, a week of living in the field as a soldier. Held in various Nebraska towns, a typical day started with a bugler's call at 5:30 a.m. Cadets washed in cold water and then did exercises until morning mess call at six. Following breakfast were drill and baseball games until noon's lunch mess call. A free afternoon preceded a regiment dress parade before the evening meal at 6:00 p.m. Once a week females were allowed to visit the camp so they could watch summer camp activities. Summer camp is still held, now called JROTC Leadership Camp.

In 1886, girls had requested drill instruction, and an army officer replied if there was enough interest it could be provided. A women's company was raised the next year and male Cadets were detailed to instruct the girls as requested. The women's creation was short-lived, a victim of male prejudice as presented in an article that appeared in a Washington D.C. newspaper. Military discipline, it read, would be a mockery because women could not serve in the army. Better that they devote their time to exercise, elocution, and tennis as more befitting their sex. Girls were finally welcomed into the ROTC in 1973.

Military Ball

A major social event for Central's ROTC was the annual Military Ball at Peony Park . As of this writing, the Ball is an inter-school event and takes place at the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Milo Bail Student Center. Participating schools share music and martial drills and the Battalion's Commander and his Lady, she in Central's traditional purple and white cape, are introduced and other officers' ranks and assignments are announced. Two by two the Cadets and their Ladies, in beautiful gowns, proceed down the length of the Ball Room in the Grand March under Cadets' raised sabers.

Road Show

Newsworthy in 1900 was the claim that "this year's Officer's Musical was one of the best," enjoying a \$100 profit, bringing together talented musicians to perform for Central students. For years the Commissioned Officers Club sponsored Vaudeville Shows, using proceeds to pay for uniforms for students who could not afford them. The title of Road Show replaced Vaudeville in 1914 to help fund the Athletic Department, support the annual summer camps, and underwrite the Road Show.

Federal Inspection

Federal inspections, now called Brigade Formal Inspection, are conducted annually to ensure high standards and levels of performance are sustained. A unit can be named an Honor Unit with Distinction, Honor Unit, or Merit Unit. Failure to meet the Merit Unit criteria warrants probation and a two year period to improve or risk dissolution of the program. Central has been an Honor Unit with Distinction for the past twelve years. Cadets prepare sharp and meticulous uniforms to ensure that their appearance and bearing are impeccable. Uniforms are carefully pressed and shoes and buttons polished to a glistening finish. Records and activities are examined with Inspector General thoroughness and military formations observed for their precision. Scores are assessed and the inspection concludes with a Pass in Review Parade.

Curriculum

JROTC'S mission and objectives are stated in the opening paragraph of this review. Thus it is appropriate to conclude with remarks about how they are implemented in the twenty-first century. Approximately thirty percent of the curriculum focuses on civic education and life skills. A listing of course content and offerings is lengthy and comprehensive, including leadership skills, diversity appreciation, tobacco and drug awareness, study of the three branches of the national government, advanced communication, electoral processes, career planning, and financial planning. A student without exposure to monetary processes may be introduced to personal money management. World War II is addressed as is the Cold War. Co-existing with these educational pursuits are close order drill, physical training, infantry weaponry, and combat principles.

In 2011 Central's leadership team advanced to the finals of the 2012 Regional Final Championship round of that year's Army JROTC Leadership Bowl and Symposium held in Washington D.C. The Cadets were tested on standard high school curriculum including math, science, and English, as well as leadership and citizen principles. The JROTC's Leadership and Academic Bowl competition, limited to JROTC students, is dedicated to academic excellence and preparation for college and university.

The JROTC reflects its origins as a component of American national security and the goals and objectives remain of paramount importance.

Once called "the cornerstone of the Central High Regiment" Franklin Gulgard for over thirty years was a faithful and committed leader of Central's JROTC and its Cadets. Generations of Central JROTC alumni remember him as the gentleman who presided over "the Cage" where he managed uniform distribution. For many years after, they received a birthday greeting from Mr. "G."

Mr. "G" we salute you.

Orville D. Menard, CHS 1951
November, 2013