A CAMPUS MOBILIZED FOR DEFERMENTS: USING ROTC TO AVOID THE KOREAN WAR DRAFT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

by

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Abstract

During the early 1950s, University of Kansas officials urged their students to join the various branches of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) on campus to avoid the ongoing draft for the Korean War. This was done openly, without questioning the appropriateness of urging their students to avoid the draft. One of the many stated reasons why a KU student would volunteer for military service as an officer was that it was perceived to be much better than being a draftee in the Army. Nearly half of all men on campus would be deferred through enrollment in ROTC by the end of the war. With many university officials having been commissioned officers during the Second World War, those like Chancellor Franklin Murphy saw this avoidance of the draft as the patriotic duty of college-aged men. These beliefs would lead to stiff resistance to any attacks on the ROTC deferment scheme, especially in the case of star football player Henry "Bud" Laughlin whose ROTC deferment was revoked unduly. While the use of ROTC to avoid the draft would dramatically decrease after the Korean War due to unfulfilled promises, the institutional support for getting draft deferments for students is an important prelude to draft avoidance in the Vietnam War.

Introduction

Henry "Bud" Laughlin was fourteen years old when General MacArthur accepted the unconditional surrender of the Empire of Japan aboard the USS Missouri. Six years of total war had swept the world. Nearly sixteen million Americans had served in the armed forces. Ten million

of those men were drafted.[1] Over the next four years, Laughlin grew up in a world that was rapidly changing due to the experiences of the Second World War. Nuclear war with the communists was the rising threat in the back of many Americans' minds. By the time he entered his sophomore year at the University of Kansas (KU), North Korean troops had already crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea.[2] Another global war was on the horizon as some believed the invasion of South Korea to only be a feint in a more global plan masterminded by the Soviet Union. Mobilization was on every draft-age man's mind as the United States led the United Nations Command into the Korean peninsula in late 1950.

There were no assurances that Laughlin would be able to finish his college education before he was called up by his local draft for induction into the Army. Over ninety percent of college men like Laughlin expected that they were going to end up serving the federal government one way or another before they aged out of the draft.[3] Rather than go ahead and enlist in the Army before the draft caught up to him, Henry decided to take a chance with college. Part of the reason Laughlin took this chance was because he had a love for football and wanted to play it at KU. While his grades might have suffered because of this love during his first year of university, his desire to continue to play football was strong enough to get his grades back on track.[4] Just being a university student would not grant him reprieve from his responsibilities with the draft. Likely because his first-year grades precluded him from getting an academic college deferment,

[1] "Induction Statistics," Selective Service System, accessed March 1, 2024, https://www.sss.gov/history-and-records/induction-statistics/.
[2] "Sophs Pushing Vets For Starting Roles," *University of Kansas Alumni Magazine*, September 1950.
[3] Edward A. Suchman, Robin M. Williams, and Rose K. Goldsen, "Student Reaction to Impending Military Service," *American Sociological Review* 18, no. 3 (1953): 293–304, https://doi.org/10.2307/2087884.
[4] Franklin Murphy to Lynn Moore, September 10, 1952, RG 2/11/5/1952.4, Kenneth Spencer Research Library.

Laughlin decided to enroll in the university's Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) detachment to secure for himself a deferment from the draft.[5]

By the Korean War, there were a few different avenues for draft deferments available for college-aged men like Laughlin. Laughlin could have gotten married and started a family, started working in a critical war industry, or become medically disqualified from military service. None of these options would have fit in with Laughlin's desire to go to university and play football. His options then were to either achieve high academic standing amongst his college class, pass a selective service qualifying test, or become a member of the ROTC. Every college student had the opportunity to defer their induction into the Army to the end of the academic year if they were drafted while in college. But only by qualifying academically or by taking part in ROTC would a student be sure they could complete their entire college education without interruption from the draft.

Enrolling in ROTC was a common occurrence at KU during the Korean War. The draft deferment granted to male college students in ROTC could last the entire four years the student was studying for his degree. All that was required of the student to maintain this deferment was to keep a good standing in the ROTC program, which meant meeting the requirements to be able to commission after graduation. ROTC provided a deferment from the draft because it was a program whose purpose was to provide university-trained men to the armed forces as commissioned officers. ROTC would commission students into both the active and reserve branches of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and the newly established Air Force. While these commissioned officers would not be subject to the draft after graduation, they committed

[5] Murphy to Moore.

themselves to service in the military as officers for two to three years. One of the reasons a student might choose to join the military as an officer rather than as a draft inductee would be the ability to choose what branch and what kind of service they would be providing to the military. There was a better chance the student could get a non-combat and thus relatively safer assignment when compared to the likelihood of being in a combat role if drafted into the Army.

Scholars have claimed before that college students joined ROTC to avoid the Korean War draft, but the reasons for doing so have not been made entirely clear. George Q. Flynn stated in "The Draft and College Deferments During the Korean War" that "students enrolled in college ROTC units, some driven there by fear of the draft."[6] Flynn does not elaborate on why some of those students might have been driven to ROTC. Flynn focuses more on the academic college deferments during the Korean War instead of what was going on with the ROTC deferments.

Despite the scholarly interest in academic draft deferments, mainly because the Korean War was the first time there were academic draft deferments, there were more college men deferred due to ROTC status than those who were deferred based on academic standing during the Korean War. As can be seen in the following table from M. H. Trytten's, *Student Deferment in Selective Service: A Vital Factor in National Security*, seventy-one percent of all college men were deferred for some reason or another by January 1, 1952. Out of those college men who were deferred, twenty-five percent were deferred due to academic standing while thirty percent were deferred due to being in ROTC.[7] These percentages do not even represent the peak number of

[6] George Q. Flynn, "The Draft and College Deferments During the Korean War," *The Historian* 50, no. 3 (1988): 383.
[7] M. H. Trytten, *Student Deferment in Selective Service: A Vital Factor in National Security*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952), 54.

ROTC deferments during the Korean War. By the end of the year, 332,620 students had enrolled in ROTC, bringing the total percentage up to about thirty-seven percent of all deferred college students.[8]

Status of Male Students	Number
College deferments	
Statutory	11,857
Regulation	209,710
Total	221,567
ROTC deferments	263,000*
Veteran students exempt by law	377,503
Divinity students	28,930†
Grand total deferred or exempt‡	891,000
Total males in college	1,258,735
Remainder potentially in pool	367,735

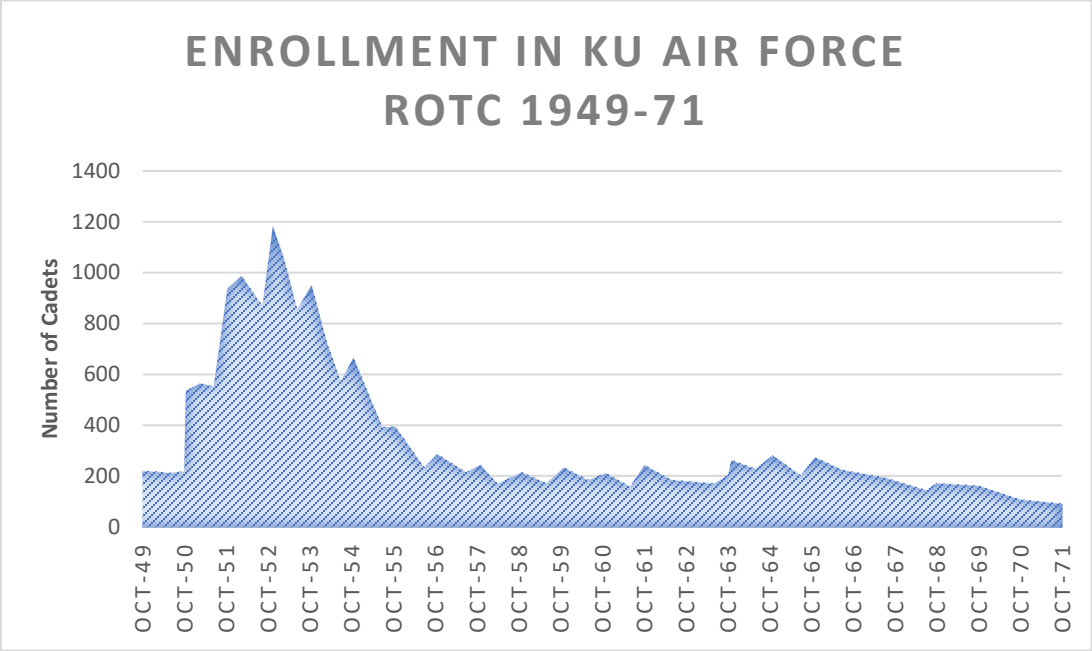
* Quota.
† Estimated.
‡ Students deferred because of membership in National Guard are not included. No estimate is available.

Table showing the number of college students available in the manpower pool on January 1st, 1952[9]

In Amy Rutenberg's *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*, she asserts that at least half of the students joining ROTC did so to avoid the draft during the Vietnam War, but little is said regarding the relationship between draft and ROTC during the Korean War.[10] The importance of ROTC enrollment during the Korean War draft has been understated while ROTC enrollment during the Vietnam War Draft has been overstated in some scholarly research. As can be seen in the following graph, ROTC enrollment at

[8] Flynn, "The Draft and College Deferments During the Korean War," 383.
[9] Trytten, *Student Deferment in Selective Service: A Vital Factor in National Security*, 54.
[10] Amy Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), 175.

KU during the Vietnam era was almost negligible when compared to the Korean War era. This is especially evident when considering the increase in student body population from 7,556 students in 1950 to 17,025 students in 1969. This meant the percentage of students participating in ROTC was much higher during the Korean War when compared to the Vietnam War.[11]



Author created graph showing the total enrollment at KU's Air Force ROTC unit over the years[12]

However, Rutenberg does detail the importance of manpower channeling in the discussion of draft avoidance. Manpower channeling utilized the fear of the draft to get young men to do what the government wanted them to do. What the government wanted draft-age men to do varied from getting married and having children to getting a job in a critical war

[11] "Student Head Count by Campus, Fall 1910 - Fall 2022" (KU Analytics, Institutional Research, & Effectiveness, n.d.), The Internet Archive, Wayback Machine, https://web.archive.org/web/20230323201543/https://kuinfo.ku.edu/how-many-students-were-enrolled-ku.

[12] "USAF STATISTICS," accessed April 1, 2024, https://www.afhistory.af.mil/USAF-STATISTICS/. The data for this graph is pulled from all the USAF Statistical Digests from 1949 to 1971. Beginning in FY 1967, the month of the collected data was not available and instead was assumed to be October of each year, which is in line with previous years. The data for university ROTC enrollment ends in 1971 which means a full comparison with the Vietnam War draft is not possible with the available data.

industry. The federal government provided deferments from the draft for those who pursued these alternative activities. Getting men to volunteer for the armed forces, or at least feel like they had the choice, was also a part of the goal of the draft.[13] The constant fear of being drafted into the Army without much say in what assignment one would get was an intended result of the pressure generated by the existence of the draft. ROTC programs across the nation were just one form of federal service that needed to be filled with the manpower channeling apparatus that was the Selective Service System. Men across the United States were channeled into many different forms of service for the government that did not necessarily mean frontline combat service as one might expect with the draft.

The stories from KU are not unique compared to all the other college campuses of the time, but some peculiarities do make KU's story slightly different. One large factor that sets KU apart from other universities with ROTC detachments was that it was one of only thirty-two universities that hosted Army, Air Force, and Navy ROTC by the end of the Korean War.[14] This allowed college students to have more selection about which ROTC branch they joined, which would allow them to have more say in what service requirement that they might have after graduation and commissioning. Schools with only one or two branches of ROTC did not get to experience the breadth of experiences those at KU faced. Nationally, one-fifth of college men were in some branch of the ROTC in 1954. KU had two-fifths of its men enrolled at the same

[13] Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*, 100.
[14] Michael S. Neiberg, *Making Citizen Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 36.

time.[15] Having all three ROTC branches does not solely explain why KU had such a large ROTC enrollment.

KU had a diverse set of actors who would play an important part in how the university and the students responded to the threat of the Korean War draft. What will be discussed later is that there were many veterans of the Second World War in positions of power at KU that were able to influence students and advocate their own opinions on the matter of the draft. Most of these college-educated men served as officers, meaning that they had an idea of the difference in experiences that an officer would have versus those an enlisted or drafted man would have. They knew what privileges would come from being an officer and wanted their students to be able to receive the same privileges if they had to serve in the military, after their college education of course.

This thesis looks to expand upon current historical knowledge about the motivations that led to college students joining ROTC during the Korean War with a close look at the University of Kansas. I argue that on the advice of the University of Kansas administration and because of their own uncertainty and fears, KU men joined ROTC en masse to maximize their chances of avoiding the draft while remaining in college during the Korean War. To do so, this paper will be broken up into three chronological segments that characterize how the KU administration and male students adapted to the changing draft environment from the beginning of the conflict in Korea to approximately 1955. The first section will look at the panic that immediately sprung up after the onset of the war on campus during the 1950-51 academic year. The second section will take a look at the 1951-52 and 1952-1953 academic years where ROTC participation reached a peak as

[15] "Kansas High In National ROTC Plan," *University Daily Kansan*, April 27, 1954.

students and the university administration grew accustomed to the draft deferments that ROTC would provide. The third section will showcase the rapid decrease in ROTC enrollment as the threat of the draft decreased and the dissatisfaction of students and faculty with ROTC increased in the 1953-54 and 1954-55 academic years.

A Year of Panic, Confusion, and Rash Decisions: 1950-1951

Panic dominated the male students at KU and worries about the draft were realistic; others were not. KU students were unsure of what was going to happen to them due to the lack of communication from national policymakers to the average college student. In their panic, these college students searched for solutions and paths for their future that would allow them some semblance of control over it. Many of them would eventually find ROTC as a solution.

Students coming to Lawrence faced an unfamiliar environment on campus in the Fall of 1950. With the outbreak of hostilities over the Summer, many had been reading the newspapers intently waiting for any information about what was going to happen. There were serious concerns about whether they would be drafted into the Army or allowed to continue their college education. For the last three years, President Truman and General Dwight D. Eisenhower had been arguing for the introduction of Universal Military Training (UMT). UMT was an idea for a program that would require all men to participate in military training before they were to be released into the reserves where they could go about their normal lives until the need arose to call them to service.[16] UMT would provide a massive reserve of men who could be called up in

[16] Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*, 41; Rutenberg, 83.

wartime, it also would delay college-aged men's education. While nothing was concrete yet in terms of UMT, the looming threat of it weighed heavily on KU men.

Some reservists and national guardsmen were already called up for service by the time the academic semester had started.[17] This led to concerns and general unrest about regular students' status with the draft. By Sept 20th, 1950, James K. Hitt, Registrar of KU, had already published multiple news releases in the student-run University Daily Kansan (UDK) trying to assuage student fears and uncertainty with the draft.[18] Hitt was trying to encourage KU students to enroll in school and worry about the draft later. Hitt knew that if students enrolled, they would at least be able to defer their induction into the Army up until the end of the academic year they were drafted. In terms of those who did not have to worry about the draft at all, Hitt explained that "students at the School of Medicine at K.U. are deferred" and that "students enrolled in Army, Air Force, and Naval R.O.T.C. units … may be deferred within quotas now being worked out by the department of defense."[19] School of Medicine students were deferred due to the need for doctors in the future. Most students concerned about the draft seem to have followed this advice as it would be determined that enrollment numbers were relatively unaffected by the draft throughout the 1950-1951 academic year.[20]

[17] "Military Expansion May Not Affect Enrollment," *University Daily Kansan*, September 13, 1950.
[18] "Want To Be Drafted? No? Then Enroll - While You Can," *University Daily Kansan*, September 19, 1950.
[19] "Military Expansion May Not Affect Enrollment."
[20] "An Enrollment Drop of 1,072," *University Daily Kansan*, September 17, 1951.

A local Army ROTC advertisement found on the same page in the UDK as an article titled "Want To Be Drafted? No? Then Enroll-While You Can"[21]

It was not long after the beginning of the war that the local Army ROTC detachment started advertising deferments from the draft to KU students in the UDK. The advertisement, shown above, took half of the page next to an article about methods to avoid the draft. This advertisement offered students the chance to "prepare now for leadership in national emergency," with the national emergency referring to the conflict in Korea.[22] The fact the

[21] "Command!," *University Daily Kansan*, September 19, 1950.
[22] "Command!"

advertisement took up a prominent place next to an article about methods to avoid the draft shows how ROTC was seen as a valid way to avoid the draft. In the same week as the previously mentioned advertisement, Colonel E. R. Kumpe, commander of KU's Army ROTC detachment, put the pressure on college students to join ROTC into perspective by explaining that "the average freshman can consider himself subject to a draft call for the next 28 years" based on the previous two wars.[23] These college students were understandably shaken by the possibility that they could be subject to the draft for more time than they had been alive. In the eyes of many KU men, two to three years of service as an officer beat out the anxiety of waiting twenty-eight years to be drafted, if not in this war, then maybe the next.

Another reason for joining ROTC that Colonel Kumpe advertised was that "the freshman now has the choice of securing training and selecting the activity of his choice in the army as an officer or risking a wartime assignment which has little resemblance to the desires of the individual."[24] Colonel Kumpe was highlighting the privileges that an officer in the military possessed over those who were drafted to be enlisted soldiers. Colonel Kumpe made it clear to KU students that "enrollment in the R.O.T.C. is the best present assurance of completing a college education."[25] Colonel Kumpe was correct with his assertion because the college draft deferment in place in 1950 only allowed a student who received their draft induction notice to finish the academic year.[26] That would only guarantee one year of college education being uninterrupted because of the draft. The other three years of a common four-year undergraduate education were

[23] "ROTC Offers Undergrads Exemptions, Commissions," *University Daily Kansan*, September 22, 1950.
[24] "ROTC Offers Undergrads Exemptions, Commissions."
[25] "ROTC Offers Undergrads Exemptions, Commissions."
[26] "Military Expansion May Not Affect Enrollment."

likely to be split apart because of military service. With ROTC being a three to four-year program that a student would take concurrently with their normal college education, a student would be certain they would be able to graduate before being required to complete their military service.

Despite these reassurances about the draft, the panic amongst the men on campus reached its peak level around finals week of the Fall 1950 semester. A variety of rumors spread around campus about what was going to happen with the yet-undefined draft. Chancellor Deane W. Malott wrote an open letter in the UDK in December listing out some of the rumors spreading amongst KU men, "All students are to be drafted in February. The V-12 is to be reinstated immediately. All the fraternities are to be taken over for military programs. All reserves will be called up at once. The military forces are to be doubled over all previous estimates."[27] This was around the time that proposals for UMT were again being heard in Congress, undoubtedly fueling some of the outlandish speculations of the students.[28] The stress of finals week and the uncertainty with how the draft would end up looking came to a boiling point. Chancellor Malott's letter was intended to calm the nerves of the KU students. He explained, "the farther along you are in your university training, before you are diverted to military service, the nearer you are to the career in civil life to which to aspire, and which some day we all expect to be available to you."[29] Chancellor Malott knew that KU students were going to have to serve in some capacity, but he also knew that they would be afforded the time to complete at least some of the college

[27] Deane Malott, "Calmness Urged In Malott Letter," *University Daily Kansan*, December 13, 1950. The V-12 program was a Navy program during the Second World War to allow for a dramatic increase in the production of Navy officers while at the same time ensuring enrollment at undergraduate universities was not crippled because of the war taking so many men from campus.
[28] Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*, 65.
[29] Malott, "Calmness Urged In Malott Letter."

education before being required to do so. Chancellor Malott was saying one thing for certain: stay in school KU students, worry about the draft later.

This level of uncertainty and panic prompted some to try to take matters into their own hands. While no KU students had been drafted by the beginning of the Spring 1950 semester, fifty KU men had taken it upon themselves to voluntarily enlist into the armed forces.[30] Volunteering to enlist was in part an intended feature of the draft. By volunteering, a man got to choose in which branch he was to join which gave him a say in how he may be employed in combat with the cost being a longer service commitment.[31] Even with these volunteers, most KU students who were thinking about voluntarily enlisting were doing so to avoid being drafted into the Army according to the Registrar of KU.[32] These fifty KU students represented less than one percent of the total enrollment at KU at the time.[33] The majority of KU students were not excitedly running down to the recruiter's office to quit school and go serve their country overseas. The fact that the number of voluntary enlistments was not higher at KU shows that KU students were more interested in finishing their studies rather than serving their nation in the military in the most immediate fashion available to them. One might think that if a person wanted to serve the nation in the current war, they would enlist into the armed forces to begin training immediately rather than waiting a year or more to then be drafted.

[30] "No Draft Changes Yet, Says Hitt," *University Daily Kansan*, December 13, 1950; Bill Taggart, "Registrar Urges Potential Draftees To Continue Schooling," *University Daily Kansan*, January 11, 1951.
[31] Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*, 109.
[32] "No Draft Changes Yet, Says Hitt."
[33] "Student Head Count by Campus, Fall 1910 - Fall 2022."

The reason for these fifty men to drop out of school and enlist in the branch of their choice was quickly made obsolete due to changes in defense department policy. By the Spring 1951 semester, students who were notified of their physical examination for induction could now enlist in the branch of their choosing up until the end of the academic term.[34] This policy change disappointingly came too late according to one UDK editor. Put simply, "the harm has been done."[35] While the new policy was welcome on campus, its delay had caused irreparable damage to colleges across the nation and at KU as students lost interest in their studies because of the uncertainty caused by the lack of decisions surrounding the draft. Students did not see the point in putting effort into their studies if they could get a letter at any moment notifying them to show up for their pre-induction physical.

The lack of interest in their studies would come back to haunt students with the introduction of the draft deferment examinations in the middle of the Spring 1951 semester. This plan would allow for students in the upper portion academically of their male peers or those who could score seventy or higher on the draft deferment examination to be deferred from the draft.[36] This deferment scheme would allow for academically successful college men to remain in college to complete their studies without needing any other source of deferment. Academic draft deferments were created to ensure that the brightest college students would be able to get adequate training to help national security, for example, as scientists, teachers, and engineers. However, this plan did leave many college men who were still ineligible for the academic draft

[34] "Malott Praises -- Draft Enlistment Change -- Regarding Students," *University Daily Kansan*, January 29, 1951.
[35] Edward Chapin, "The Harm Has Been Done," *University Daily Kansan*, February 2, 1951.
[36] Francis Kelly, "Too Bright To Fight?," *University Daily Kansan*, April 4, 1951. The portion depended on which class the college student was a part of. A freshman had to be in the upper half academically, a sophomore in the upper two-thirds, a junior in the upper three-fourths, and a senior just had to have satisfactory grades to receive a deferment.

deferment. Even those who did get an academic deferment faced the risk of losing their deferment if their grades slipped or if their peers simply got better grades than them and pushed their relative ranking downwards. An editor for the UDK humorously pointed out the importance of one's studies, "Uncle Sammy don't hardly care how dumb his soldiers is [sic]."[37]

KU students brought up some concerns with the academic draft deferment. Franklin Kelly, a UDK editor, wrote an editorial about the possibility of draft favoritism shortly after the announcement of the academic draft deferment scheme. Whether it be from parents or influential alumni, the possibility existed that educators could be pressured to give students higher grades to ensure they remained deferment eligible.[38] The same could be said about the local draft boards themselves. Local draft boards consisted of local volunteers whose job it was "to decide who among the registrants in their community would receive deferments, postponements, or exemption from military service based on the individual registrant's circumstances and beliefs."[39] These local draft boards had both the initial say in classification and the ability to address appeals for reclassification made by the registrant. In fact, draft boards were not required to grant deferments to eligible students, or anyone else with a deferment. The new law continued to allow draft boards to use their best judgment to determine if a deferment should be honored or not. Kelly made it clear to KU students that the new scheme gave draft boards "the right to legal favoritism."[40]

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[37] Kelly.
[38] Francis Kelly, "Draft Favoritism," *University Daily Kansan*, April 5, 1951.
[39] "Agency Structure," Selective Service System, accessed February 29, 2024, https://www.sss.gov/about/agency-structure/.
[40] Kelly, "Draft Favoritism."

With the lack of information and the academic draft deferments just starting to come around, the KU ROTC detachments started to see a rapid rise in cadet enrollment. Enrollment in the Air Force ROTC program more than doubled to 536 cadets in the Fall of 1950 when compared to the prewar number of 213 cadets in the Spring of 1950.[41] The largest increase in numbers came from those in the basic program, the Freshmen and Sophomores.[42] The rise in underclassmen ROTC participation shows those who were most worried about finishing their college degrees were those who had the most time remaining in college. The initial expansion of the ROTC units in the 1950-1951 academic year comes from those seeking deferment from the draft. With there being a large amount of uncertainty about how exactly the draft would be implemented, these new cadets were not willing to take the chance they would have to serve as enlisted soldiers.

Despite the strict military training imposed in ROTC, those who took advantage of the opportunity ROTC provided could still find some humor in their unfortunate situation. Humor was a common method for students to cope with the stress and uncertainty about the draft at KU. It was not uncommon to find the UDK containing a cartoon in the *Little Man on Campus* series by Richard Bibler, a local student cartoonist adored by much of the KU student body. Bibler's cartoon near finals week of the Fall 1950 semester shows army recruiters asking a professor, "Would you mind if we staple one of our little folders to all the "F-papers" before you hand them back?"[43] This little bit of humor shows how much KU students were worrying about their grades because

[41] *United States Air Force Statistical Digest, Fiscal Year 1951*, Sixth (Washington, D. C.: Directorate of Statistical Services, n.d.), https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/tr/ADA542515.
[42] The basic category correlates to the modern Air Force ROTC category of those in the General Military Course. The advanced category would correlate to cadets in the Professional Officer Course.
[43] Richard Bibler, "Little Man On Campus," *University Daily Kansan*, December 4, 1950.

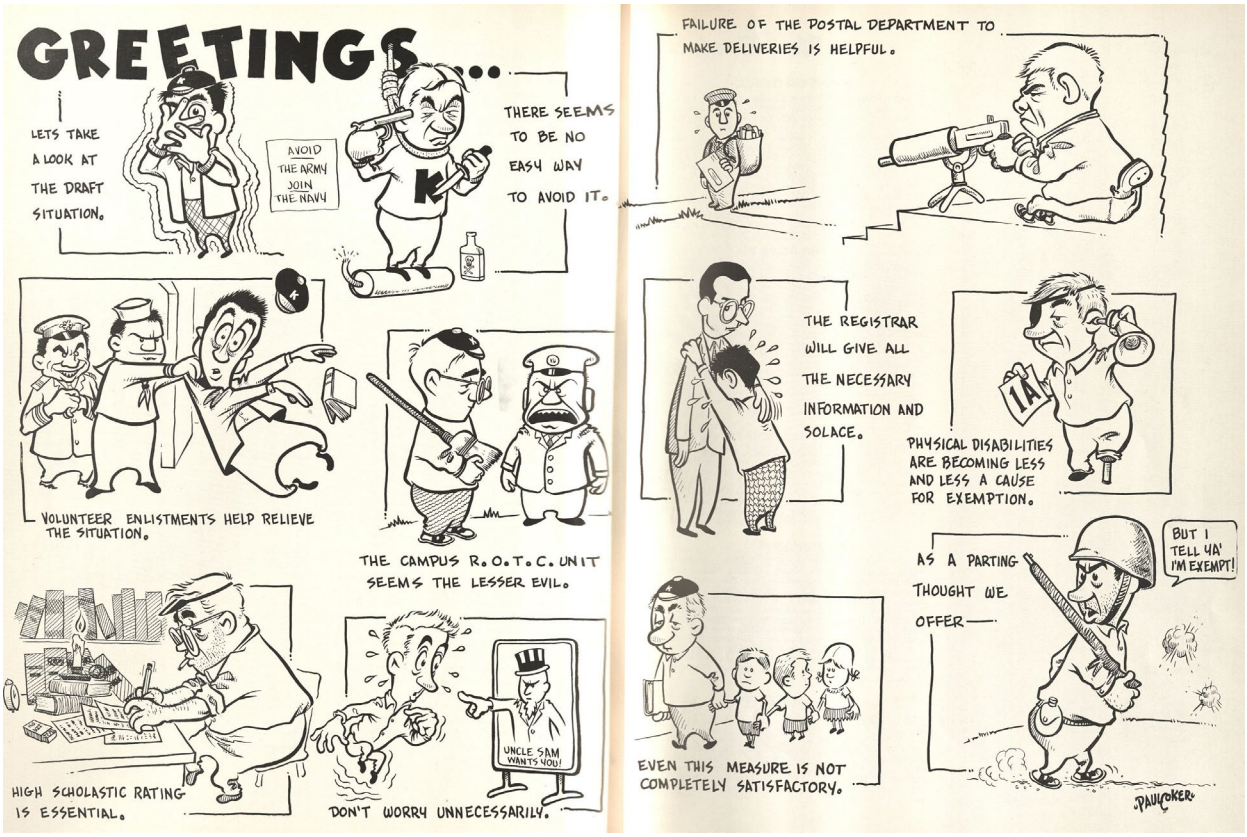
of what would happen if they slipped. KU students were thinking they would have to enlist or await induction if they started failing their classes.

A KU Freshman being Taken by Uncle Sam with KU's Fraser Hall in the Background.[44]

Another cartoon that made an appearance in the UDK is the one above, which shows a KU freshman, with the traditional freshman cap, being ripped from his studies by Uncle Sam.[45] This cartoon made two separate appearances in the UDK, which both happened to be in the first semester after the conflict in Korea kicked off.[46] The way Uncle Sam is portrayed as taking the young KU freshman shows how that KU men felt they were being taken by surprise and without

[44] Marvin Arth., "He's In The Army Now," *University Daily Kansan*, September 25, 1950.
[45] Arth.
[46] John Corporon, "Same Old Sad Song As 30 KU Students Take Draft Physicals," *University Daily Kansan*, December 13, 1950.

consent by the draft system. KU men did not have all the information available to them that would allow them to say they knew what was exactly going to happen with the draft.



Cartoon series relating to the draft from the 1950-51 KU Yearbook[47]

The cartoons shown above depict all of the feelings that KU students were going through in the first year after the Korean War began. The "Avoid the Army - Join the Navy" sign on the first cartoon shows students were willing to join other branches if that kept them out of the Army. The other cartoons making fun of disability and dependency deferments not working showcase how students saw them as not being an option for them to avoid the draft. The caption to one cartoon being, "The campus R.O.T.C. unit seems the lesser evil" shows how students were joining ROTC as the only option rather than joining it completely on their own accord. Note the paternalistic

[47] *Jayhawker*, vol. 63 (Lawrence, KS, 1951), 26–27.

framing of Registrar Hitt in consoling the KU student crying about the draft. This was how KU students viewed the university faculty. The university faculty were the ones KU students would go to with problems with the draft.

The culture on campus was changing from what it had been before the introduction of the draft. As one humorous article from the UDK explained, "The ordinary subjects of conversation among college men, in order of importance, probably run something like this: 1. Girls, 2. Off-color stories, 3. Girls, 4. Beer, 5. Girls, 6. Studies. Or rather they did run something like the above until the advent of **THE DRAFT**."[48] The draft was now the main topic of concern to KU students. These jokes and gags did not show that KU students thought that the draft was a joke and that it was not something to worry about. Instead, a student from the time put it clearly, "while they take draft matters seriously enough, K.U. men joke about it much as a man about to have a tooth pulled grins at the dentist."[49] Morale on campus was being depressed by the looming threat of the draft, but KU men were not going to let it be broken, and instead used humor to make light of the serious situation.

By the end of the 1950-1951 academic year, the feeling on campus had moved from one of uncertainty and panic to more of an uneasy existence. The doubling in size of the Air Force ROTC shows how many KU students saw and believed the early assurances from Chancellor Mallott and Registrar Hitt about the draft deferment opportunities in the ROTC programs. With the Selective Service System finally giving out information about academic draft deferments as well, even more college students felt they would be able to stay in college and avoid the draft.

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[48] George Hess, "Draft Now Main Topic In Student Gab Fests," *University Daily Kansan*, March 5, 1951.
[49] Hess.

With the introduction of the academic draft deferment plan not only were grades improving, but also student morale. Students across the nation were coming out of their panicked shells and encountering a new feeling of confidence and understanding as there were now paths in front of them to get the draft deferments they so desired. By the beginning of the next academic year, however, there would be concerns raised about whether these academic draft deferments were legally guaranteed or not. ROTC deferments would soon see an even greater rise in desirability and availability.

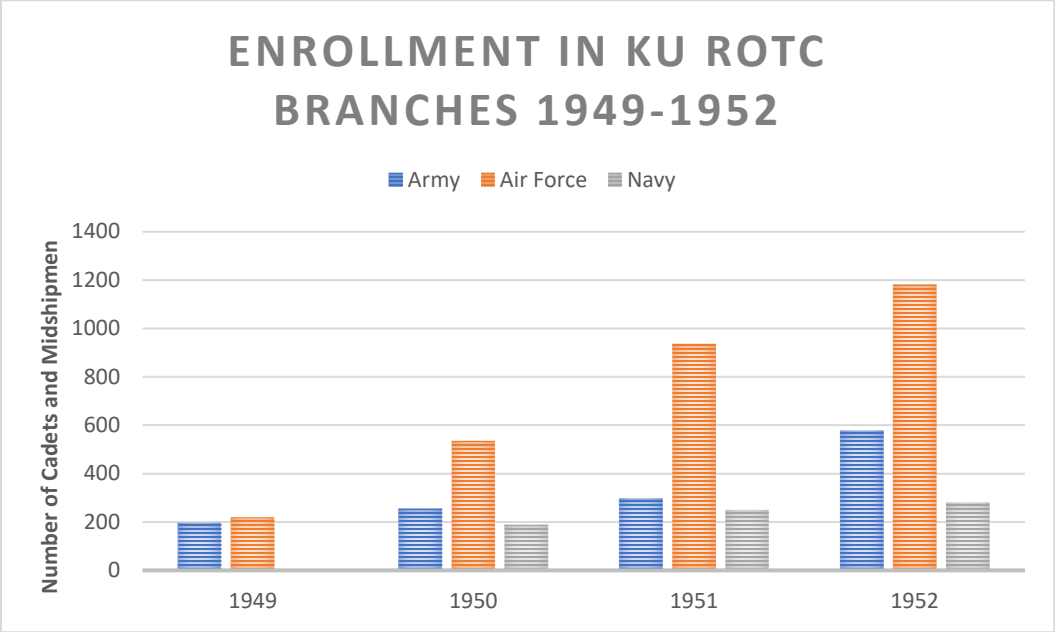
The Years of Getting Deferments: 1951-1953

The three branches of ROTC had been together on KU's campus since 1946 when the Navy and Air Force joined the already established Army ROTC detachment. Thirteen percent of KU men were part of an ROTC program before the Korean War.[50] The 1950-51 and 1951-52 academic years would each see the Air Force ROTC detachment at the university double in size. By the Fall 1952 semester, fifty percent of KU men were part of an ROTC program.[51] This was a near quadrupling of the size of ROTC on campus. It is important to note that KU was not a land grant university, which meant that mandatory ROTC participation was not a requirement at the university as

[50] "Student Head Count by Campus, Fall 1910 - Fall 2022"; E. F. Kumpe to George Smith, "Army ROTC Enrollment," February 27, 1953, Kenneth Spencer Research Library; *United States Air Force Statistical Digest, Jan 1949-Jun 1950*, Fifth (Washington, D. C.: Directorate of Statistical Services, n.d.), https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA551604. This number is an estimate as Navy midshipmen numbers at KU could not be found from before the war. The Army and Air Force ROTC experienced a doubling in size from before to after the start of the war. The Navy number was estimated by extrapolating the numbers before the war with the growth in the Army and Air Force units and the Fall 1950 midshipmen numbers.

[51] *United States Air Force Statistical Digest, Fiscal Year 1952*, Seventh (Washington, D. C.: Directorate of Statistical Services, n.d.), https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA542516; Kumpe to Smith, "Army ROTC Enrollment," February 27, 1953; "ROTC Units Hit Top Enrollment," *University Daily Kansan*, September 22, 1952.

compared to land grant schools like Kansas State. ROTC participation would remain voluntary at KU throughout the war.[52]



Author created chart of KU ROTC branch enrollment between 1949 and 1952[53]

The interest in ROTC amongst KU students grew so high that enrollment quotas that were originally in place for the Army and Air Force detachments were lifted in the Fall 1951 semester. Normally, only KU freshmen and veterans were allowed to enroll in the ROTC program. With interest so high, even those who had been prevented from joining previously due to not being freshmen were allowed to join.[54] In a joint statement by Colonel Kumpe and Lieutenant Colonel Moore, the removal of the quota was said to "allow more students to gain deferment from the draft."[55] To have the commanders of the Army and Air Force ROTC units advertise the draft deferment benefit shows how ROTC was seen even to these military commanders as a valid way

[52] Neiberg, *Making Citizen Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service*, 36.
[53] See Footnote 50 for information regarding the limitations of the data. Extrapolated Navy ROTC enrollment for 1949 was not plotted for the sake of clarity.
[54] "ROTC Units Open Again," *University Daily Kansan*, September 19, 1951.
[55] "ROTC Units Open Again."

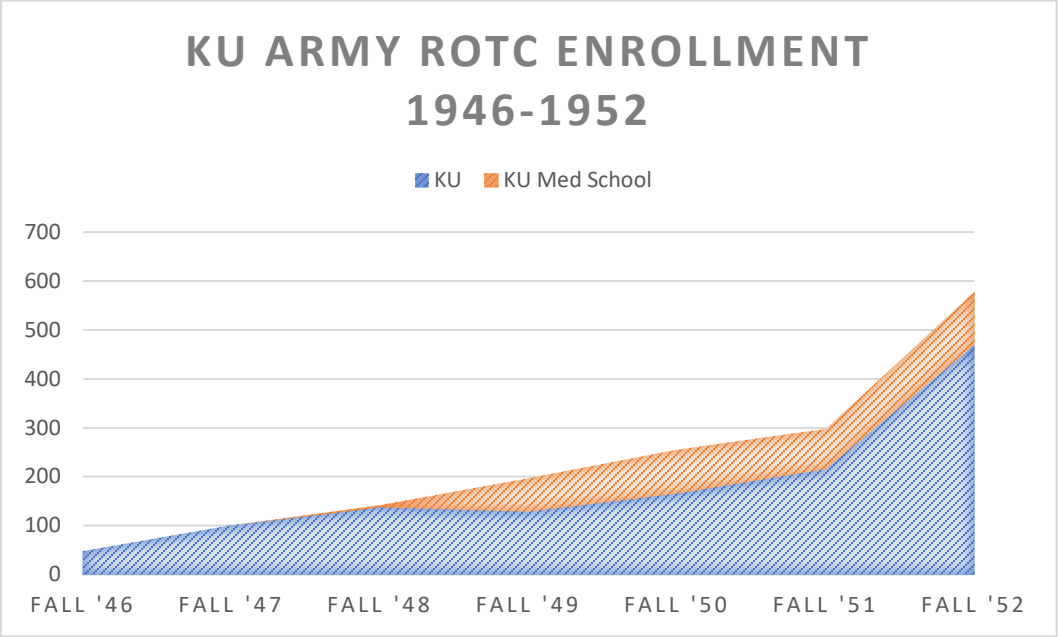
to avoid the draft. Meanwhile, the Navy ROTC had its own congressionally mandated quota that prevented an open enrollment of interested KU students. This is the reason why Navy ROTC enrollment was relatively stable throughout the Korean War era.

At the start of the 1951-52 academic year, the Department of Defense gave assurances that every ROTC cadet and midshipman would be allowed to finish their university degrees even if there was a period of full-scale mobilization. The commanders of the three local ROTC detachments "interpreted the announcement as strengthening the R.O.T.C. opportunity for an educational postponement of military service coupled with the assurance that such service as is required will be in a commissioned officer status."[56] While these assurances were similar to those previously expected of what one could get out of ROTC, they did explicitly state that university students would be able to finish their degrees before being required to serve. The service that would be required was assured would be as a commissioned officer rather than as an enlisted man.

In reference to increasing draft calls announced at the same time as the assurances, James K. Hitt was quoted as saying that "the pressure [of the draft] will be the greatest on the student who is not a member of the R.O.T.C. units since the rules regarding his deferment are only advisory."[57] Again, as during the 1950-1951 academic year, Hitt was advertising the benefits of ROTC being that of the draft deferment that would be granted to the student. These assurances about ROTC being safe from the draft, the pressure on non-ROTC students increasing, and the opening of late enrollments into the Army and Air Force ROTC detachments at KU helped create

[56] "ROTC's Assured of Finishing Degrees," *University Daily Kansan*, September 20, 1951.
[57] "ROTC's Assured of Finishing Degrees."

the atmosphere on campus that would lead to the largest enrollment increase in ROTC that KU would ever see. Five hundred new students enrolled in ROTC in the Fall of 1951 compared to around four hundred new students who enrolled in the Fall of 1950.[58] Certainly the confidence of receiving and then retaining draft deferment status prompted many KU men to enroll in ROTC on campus.



Author created graph showing KU Army ROTC enrollment during the Korean War[59]

The graph shown above shows KU Army ROTC enrollment during the period between 1946 and 1952. Note the fall in enrollment after the Air Force ROTC was established on campus in 1949 and the slow increase in enrollment numbers with the start of the war. Most of the gain in enrollment comes from the KU School of Medicine after the beginning of the war rather than

[58] *United States Air Force Statistical Digest, Fiscal Year 1952*; Kumpe to Smith, "Army ROTC Enrollment," February 27, 1953; "Large Increase In Three ROTC Enrollments," *University Daily Kansan*, September 18, 1951; "CO's Say Larger ROTC Due to Korean War," *University Daily Kansan*, October 11, 1950.

[59] Kumpe to Smith, "Army ROTC Enrollment," February 27, 1953. The 1946-49 figures represent combined Army and Air Force ROTC enrollment before the creation of Air Force ROTC on campus in 1949. The KU School of Medicine Army ROTC was tracked separately because it operated differently than the main campus detachment.

students flocking to Army ROTC for a deferment.[60] The largest bump in enrollment comes from the introduction of a quota system that restricted the number of students who could join Air Force ROTC based on the amount who were enrolled in Army ROTC on campus. This quota system allowed forty percent of the total combined Air Force and Army ROTC enrollment to enroll in the Army with the remaining sixty percent going to the Air Force.[61] This policy was put in place because nationally there were too many students opting to join Air Force ROTC over Army ROTC, and this was affecting the Army's ability to commission enough quality officers. The reason why so many students were joining Air Force ROTC over Army ROTC is similar to why most of those who joined Air Force ROTC opted for safer non-flying assignments rather than riskier flying assignments.[62] The lack of desire to do riskier or more traditionally combat focused jobs in the Army and the Air Force shows how students were trying to get their military service commitment out of the way in the safest way they could.

KU faculty support towards the deferment of KU students from the draft played a major part in why draft deferment using ROTC was so prevalent at KU. Various deans and other KU figures were involved in the decision-making and advocacy that would lead to the policies put into place that affected ROTC and the draft. Most important was the person who was chancellor for much of the Korean War, Franklin Murphy. Chancellor Murphy had unconventional experience working for the national interest during wartime. During the Second World War, Murphy conducted clinical trials of the use of penicillin at breakneck speed for the National Research

[60] Kumpe to Smith.
[61] Franklin Murphy to James T. Hill Jr., September 5, 1952, RG 2/11/5/1952.4, Kenneth Spencer Research Library.
[62] Vance Mitchell, *Air Force Officers: Personnel Policy Development 1944-1974* (Bolling AFB, D. C.: Air Force History Support Office, 1996), 118, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA432941.

Council. Then, having been recruited into the Army for his research abilities, Captain Murphy helped develop synthetic quinine, a treatment for malaria, along with other Army researchers.[63] This unconventional experience meant that Chancellor Murphy understood what it meant to support the nation's security in a more academic sense rather than having to fight with a rifle in his hands. He knew that men with college experience had so much more to offer to the nation's future national security than just being cannon fodder in the present war. Those with a formal college education had the potential to be the next engineers, doctors, teachers, and business leaders who helped develop a new product or idea for the next war. These ideas would help shape who Murphy assigned as deans and how he would direct the university throughout the fifties.

Murphy's connections throughout the civilian and military world were extensive, and he was well-known nationally at the time. At one point, President Dwight D. Eisenhower asked Murphy to be his Secretary of Health and Welfare, and when Murphy declined, he later asked Murphy to become his Secretary of the Army.[64] Murphy had the influence to get what he wanted done which would help him get his way with his involvement in the ROTC. Chancellor Murphy would often receive invitations to attend conferences and events from the various branches' ROTC headquarters. These events would range from a week's trip on a battleship that is cruising around the world with KU midshipmen to a conference discussing the future of the Air Force ROTC's new curriculum overhaul.[65] On the occasions that he could not make it, he would often send ranking KU representatives like Lawrence C. Woodruff, Dean of Men, as seen in the following image.

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[63] Nancy Kellogg Harper, *The Making of a Leader: Franklin D. Murphy The Kansas Years* (Lawrence, KS: Jayhawk Ink, 2016), 27; John McCool, "Rising Son," KU Memorial Union, accessed November 16, 2023, https://union.ku.edu/rising-son.

[64] Harper, *The Making of a Leader: Franklin D. Murphy The Kansas Years*, 116.

[65] Franklin Murphy to Dan Kimball, April 25, 1952, RG 2/11/5/1951.4, Kenneth Spencer Research Library; Franklin Murphy to M. K. Deichelmann, October 27, 1952, RG 2/11/5/1952.4, Kenneth Spencer Research Library.

KU Midshipmen standing with Dean Woodruff (Wearing dark pants) during a Navy ROTC Summer cruise.[66]

Dr. Forrest C. "Phog" Allen, a name that is famous to many college basketball fans, was the chairman of the Lawrence draft board in 1952. This position meant that Dr. Allen was directly involved in the process of choosing which draft-eligible men to induct and which to give deferments to.[67] One must remember that the local draft board had the final say in any deferment, as all deferments were only advisory.[68] When asked about what ways a potential college-aged inductee could receive a deferment, Dr. Allen reiterated the three ways, passing "a Selective Service college qualification test, be[ing] deferred by statute, or by joining an ROTC unit."[69] Another ranking faculty member, Dean T. De Witt Carr of the School of Engineering and Architecture, was also advocating for the deferment of engineers from the draft during the Korean War.[70] While nothing concrete would come from Dean Carr's advocacy, it helps to show how

[66] *Jayhawker*, 1951, 63:21.
[67] "18-Year-Olds Still Safe From Draft, Allen Says," *University Daily Kansan*, February 5, 1953.
[68] Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*, 89.
[69] "18-Year-Olds Still Safe From Draft, Allen Says."
[70] "Engineers To Be Draft-Exempt," *University Daily Kansan*, September 28, 1951.

broad the support for deferments from the draft was from the faculty of KU and how they were willing to put in the legwork to try to get as many deferments as possible for their students.

Overall, the university administration was upfront about its encouragement for KU students to join ROTC to avoid the draft. This encouragement was communicated directly, without obfuscation or worry about seeming to appear unpatriotic or disloyal. Considering that anti-Communist McCarthyism was rampant in its attacks on universities during this period, to have university officials actively and openly encouraging students to avoid the draft might seem outlandish, but that is what was so effective about using ROTC to avoid the draft. Students could not be labeled as unpatriotic for signing up to serve their country four years from now. Officials also could not be accused of being communist sympathizers if they encouraged their best and brightest to become future military officers. KU's faculty wanted what was best for its men and presumed that most of their students were going to end up in military service anyway, so they opted to make sure their students were educated at their university before being sent off to military service.

A serious situation for the ROTC draft deferment scheme at KU arose early in the Fall semester of 1952 when Air Force ROTC cadet and star football player Henry Laughlin was reclassified from I-D (deferred because of reserve status) to I-A (eligible for draft) by Laughlin's local draft board in Missouri.[71] This change in classification from deferred due to being an ROTC cadet to eligible for the draft came as a shock to KU faculty and students. This is because Laughlin was an active member of KU's Air Force ROTC detachment, which for the last two years had been

[71] Richard Bergman, "History of the Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps, August - December 1952" (Maxwell AFB: HQ AFROTC, April 1, 1953), K239.07K Aug-Dec 1952, Air Force Historical Research Agency.

advertised as offering deferment from the draft by university, government, and military officials alike.

As previously stated, Laughlin joined Air Force ROTC in his Sophomore year to avoid the draft and be able to continue playing football at KU. Laughlin did not pursue an academic draft deferment because of the less-than-stellar grades he received in his freshman year. By his junior year, Laughlin had put in the effort needed for his studies, ROTC training, and football training. His dedication paid off when he was drafted into the NFL by the San Francisco 49ers while still only a junior in January of 1952.[72] Henry Laughlin had a great senior year ahead of him until he received a nondescript brown envelope bearing the markings of the Selective Service System informing him of the removal of his draft deferment status.

Immediately upon learning of Laughlin's situation, the bureaucratic cogs of the university sprang into action to rectify what seemed like an obvious error on the part of Laughlin's local draft board. Chancellor Murphy knew Laughlin personally and was not going to let one of his students be taken away to Korea by a breach in the agreed-upon rules for draft deferment.[73] Chancellor Murphy sent a scathing letter to Lieutenant Colonel Lynn Moore, commander of the local Air Force ROTC detachment at KU, about the breach of the promise of draft deferment for Laughlin by participating in Air Force ROTC.[74] When this letter and the actions taken by Lieutenant Colonel Moore produced nothing of value, Chancellor Murphy utilized his connections within the national ROTC structure and directly called Air Force Brigadier General Matthew Deichelmann,

[72] "Bud Laughlin Stats, Position, College, Transactions," Pro Football Archives, accessed November 11, 2023, https://www.profootballarchives.com/playerl/laug00200.html.
[73] Murphy to Moore, September 10, 1952.
[74] Murphy to Moore.

commander of the national Air Force ROTC program.[75] Not long after, Laughlin's deferment predicament was briefed to the Assistant Secretary of Defense, the Assistant secretaries of both the Army and Air Force, and the Director of the Selective Service System. Chancellor Murphy was going to utilize every connection he had to protect Laughlin's promised deferment.

School and military officials quickly contacted Laughlin's local draft board and tried to explain the situation. Despite the facts of Laughlin's active and satisfactory participation in Air Force ROTC, the appeal of his change in draft status was rejected by a vote of three to zero. The appeal was rejected even though the Selective Service Headquarters in Washington, D.C. had sent a telegram directing Laughlin's induction to be canceled.[76] The rejection of Laughlin's appeal caused great concern in academic and military leaders across the nation. General Deichelmann pointed out that "if local draft boards could overrule one deferment, the Air Force ROTC program could collapse."[77] If draft deferments that were granted to college students and ROTC cadets were not honored, there would be little reason for draft-age men to go to join ROTC if they instead could take the chance of not having to serve at all. Without a deferment, participation in ROTC would just be a prolonging of military service when instead a man could attend college without having to deal with the factors of military training and just take the risk that he would be called up to serve through the draft rather than guaranteeing military service through participation in ROTC.

[75] Bergman, "History of the Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps, August - December 1952," bk. 2.
[76] Bergman, bk. 2.
[77] Bergman, 37.

Chancellor Murphy was "shocked, and candidly quite angry, over what [was] clearly a breach not only of all directives and expressed policy, but of indeed the law itself."[78] While Chancellor Murphy was understandably upset by Laughlin's induction into the Army, the fact remained that Laughlin's local draft board did nothing illegal. Local draft boards were autonomous and were not legally required to uphold any kind of draft deferment. Congress had molded the Selective Service system this way to prevent any accusations of there being a protected class in society that was immune to being drafted.[79] Congress believed that local draft boards would be able to take the advisory draft deferments and apply them in a way to ensure no one was cheating the draft system.

Laughlin's induction into the Army spurred accusations from Chancellor Murphy that Laughlin's local draft board thought that KU was just protecting him because of his star football status.[80] In fact, KU was not showing favoritism by unduly protecting its football players. In the Fall 1952 semester, there had been three different football players who were denied acceptance into Air Force ROTC due to their academic records disqualifying them.[81] One can see why Chancellor Murphy might make this accusation against the local Missouri draft board considering the decades-long fierce rivalry between KU and the University of Missouri. This rivalry was so intense that Dr. Allen had accused the University of Missouri in 1948 of being behind rule changes that disqualified five KU football players from playing.[82] This connection is made even more potent when considering Laughlin had been drafted by the 49ers in his junior year. Jealousy could

[78] Murphy to Moore, September 10, 1952.
[79] Rutenberg, *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*, 89.
[80] Murphy to Moore, September 10, 1952.
[81] Murphy to Moore.
[82] Piontek Keith, "A College Sports Rivalry Like No Other: Public Memory of the Border War in the Missouri-Kansas Football Competition," *The State Historical Society of Missouri* 110, no. 1 (October 2015): 38.

very much have been the driving factor causing the local draft board to ignore Laughlin's satisfactory performance in the Air Force ROTC and instead induct him into the army to deprive him of the opportunity to help the KU football team that season.

Laughlin's role as a star football student gave his situation a heightened focus on campus among not only the faculty but also the students. With someone's ROTC status being ignored and themselves being taken by the draft, there was concern that other KU men in ROTC would be at risk of being drafted as well. In remembering Laughlin in the UDK, the Kansas Sports editor Bob Longstaff wrote, "There was a sad moment in the KU locker room when Bud Laughlin turned in his equipment. Laughlin – although in AFROTC – was ordered to report for induction into the Army."[83] Longstaff emphasized the fact Laughlin was in Air Force ROTC to get the reader thinking about their own relationship between the draft and ROTC. A front-page UDK article just a few days later explained that "No new developments had been reported by today in the University investigation to seek a definite determination of the status of ROTC students in regard to Selective Service. The investigation was instigated last week when fullback Henry "Bud" Laughlin was drafted, although he was regularly enrolled in the AFROTC."[84] KU students were extremely interested in the outcome of Laughlin's case, especially considering half of the men were relying on the draft deferment provided by ROTC to finish their education. With his appeal denied, Laughlin had no choice but to show up for his induction into the army. After his two years of Army

[83] Bob Longstaff, "Along the Jayhawker Trail," *University Daily Kansan*, September 15, 1952, sec. B.
[84] "No Developments in Laughlin Case," *University Daily Kansan*, September 19, 1952.

service in Korea, Laughlin would come back to KU to finish his education in 1955 and then would finally get to play for the 49ers.[85]

A similar case six months before Laughlin's was the case of KU student Max Thompson. Thompson was a UDK writer who took the Selective Service College Qualifications test in the Spring of 1951. He got a seventy-two on his test, which was not a great score, but it was at least high enough to make him eligible for deferment. Thompson was also in the upper one-fourth of his class at KU, which was also high enough to make him eligible for deferment from the draft. Despite both these facts, his local draft board classified him as I-A, just like Henry Laughlin.[86] Unlike Laughlin's case, other than the article Thompson wrote himself, there was not any record of general student concern in the UDK. KU students were more understanding about how draft deferments based on academic standing were only advisory as Registrar Hitt had explained earlier that academic year.[87] Those with an academic draft deferment understood they might be inducted into the Army at any time if their local draft board so desired to ignore their academic achievements. KU ROTC cadets and midshipmen were much more rattled by the fact that their deferment may be more advisory than statutory.

The desire of students to join the ROTC programs at KU was high, but even then, it is evident that not all of them were able to do so. At the beginning of the 1952 academic year, there were 130 applicants for only 60 slots in the Navy ROTC.[88] The sheer size of the ROTC detachments on campus and the desire to produce quality candidates for service as officers in the military

[85] "Henry James 'Bud' Laughlin (1931-1986) - Find a...," accessed February 23, 2024, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/55534229/henry_james-laughlin.
[86] Max Thompson, "Writer Thought He Did Okay On Draft Test; Well, He Did--," *University Daily Kansan*, March 12, 1952.
[87] "ROTC's Assured of Finishing Degrees."
[88] "60 Students Receive NROTC Appointments," *University Daily Kansan*, September 16, 1952.

restricted the number of cadets and midshipmen. Those with less-than-stellar academic performance might not be allowed to enroll in ROTC, just like the three football players who were denied admission. Laughlin's situation shows there was an ardent desire to enroll in ROTC to receive deferment from the draft amongst students and plenty of support from the university faculty that led them.

The Decline of ROTC Deferments: 1953-55

By the third year of the conflict and the second year of stalemate, the appeal of ROTC's draft deferment was starting to wear thin on many KU students. The Army was quickly losing its appeal to both ROTC cadets and enlisted volunteers with "constant confusion, the slow promotions, and many, many broken promises," according to one newspaper article.[89] A UDK editor pointed out that because of these issues within the army, "the once eagerly-sought Regular Army Commissions are now being turned down by ROTC graduates."[90] The Army's desire for active duty officers went against what those who joined ROTC to get a draft deferment wanted. Those with ROTC draft deferments wanted to have their own control over their careers. Commissioning into the Regular Army would mean a few years of military service. Commissioning into the reserve would allow ROTC graduates to begin their civilian careers immediately.

After the armistice was signed, the Navy came to the same realization as the Army when they discovered that only ten percent of all regular Navy ROTC midshipmen stayed in the Navy past their minimum service commitment. Regular Navy ROTC midshipmen had their college

[89] Mary Cooper, "Army May Have to Resort to 3-Year Draft Program," *University Daily Kansan*, March 13, 1953.
[90] Cooper.

expenses paid for by the Navy. In comparison, contract Navy ROTC midshipmen operated similarly to cadets in Army and Air Force ROTC who did not get their college paid for.[91] An editorial from KU student Tom Stewart blasted the House Armed Services committee for thinking it was poor monetary compensation that prevented Navy ROTC midshipmen from making a career out of the military. Instead, Stewart argued that "very few men who graduate from college consider a career in the armed services," even "those who have all or part of their way paid by the government."[92] Stewart laid out two reasons why someone might accept government aid while in college that would incur a service commitment: the first was that all money is helpful when one was in school, the second was that "it is a guarantee that one won't be drafted."[93] The students at KU had by this point completely accepted the idea that participation in ROTC was a way to get out of the draft that had been pushed by university officials ever since the war started. The title of Stewart's article showed KU student opinion clearly: "ROTC Seen As 'Free Ride.'"[94] Regular KU Navy ROTC midshipmen were seeing their participation in ROTC as an opportunity to get their college paid for rather than an opportunity to embark on an extensive career in the Navy.

The military's plans for its ROTC graduates were not what these college students were expecting when they joined up. In 1951, for example, only thirty-four percent of Air Force ROTC graduates were assigned to active duty while in 1954 ninety-one percent were assigned to active duty. For all three branches, approximately eighty percent of ROTC graduates were assigned to active duty during the war.[95] The promise of reserve commissions, being the named purpose of

[91] *Jayhawker*, vol. 66 (Lawrence, KS, 1954), 108.
[92] Tom Stewart, "ROTC Seen As 'Free Ride,'" *University Daily Kansan*, November 9, 1953.
[93] Stewart.
[94] Stewart.
[95] Neiberg, *Making Citizen Soldiers: ROTC and the Ideology of American Military Service*, 48.

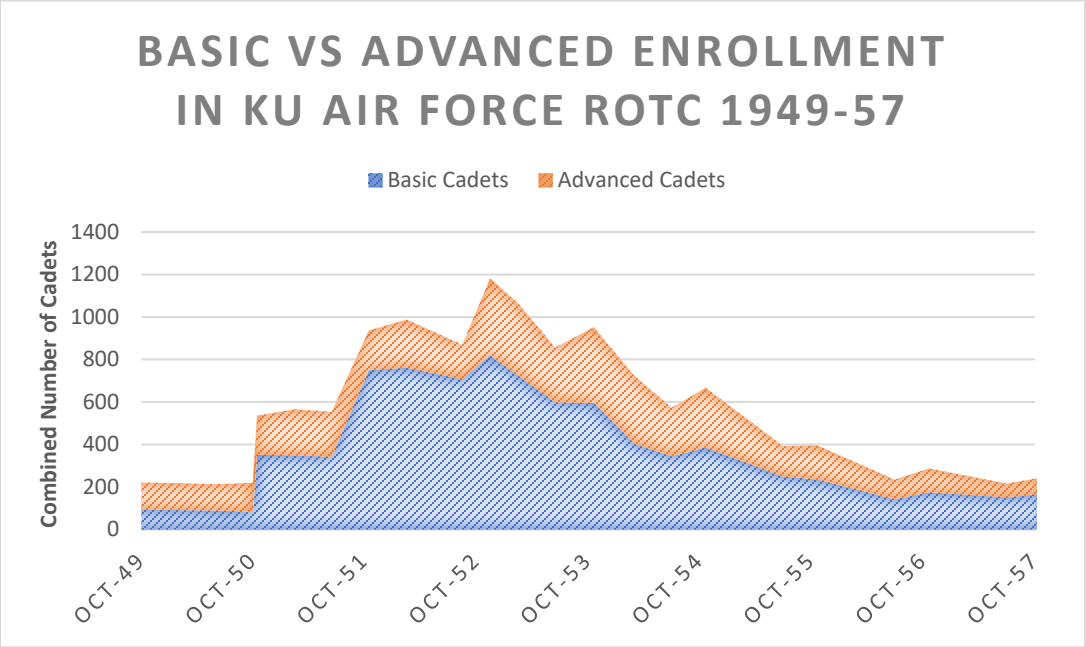
the *Reserve* Officer Training Corps, was what got these students to enroll before 1952. Prior ROTC graduates did not need to worry about serving on active duty as only the best cadets and midshipmen were assigned to active duty before the Korean War. With the shift from reserve commissions to regular commissions, students were required to do something they did not expect when they enrolled in ROTC.

The reason these military careers were unattractive to many was that the economic potential for college graduates during the Korean War was astronomical. Nationally, the economy seemed desperate for as many college graduates as it could get. Even though it was estimated that "50 to 85 per cent of the male class of 1953 will be drafted and working for Uncle Sam before the year is out," some employers were "willing to hire young men for whatever training period is possible before their draft numbers comes up."[96] KU graduates could rest easy that they would be able to find a job when they graduated and that even if they were drafted, employers were willing to make it work. Suddenly ROTC was starting to seem like a hindrance to their civilian careers to some students.

Due to the ready availability of Air Force ROTC enrollment records at KU, this overall decline in interest, displayed in the following graphs, can very easily be determined. The rapid increase in enrollment after the war began and the peak in 1953 is quite evident in this graph. Shortly thereafter, with the armistice signed in July of 1953, the enrollment in KU's Air Force ROTC decreased just as rapidly as it had grown. The basic enrollment, which consisted of Freshmen and Sophomores, had seen the greatest increase in size at the beginning of the war. To join the

[96] United Press, "Job Hunting College Seniors Have Never Had It So Good," *University Daily Kansan*, March 30, 1953.

advanced program without first being in the basic program, one had to have previous military service. Much of the pre-war advanced enrollment, which includes Juniors and Seniors, came from Second World War veteran enrollment in ROTC at KU, explaining why there were more advanced cadets than basic cadets before the conflict began.



Author made graph showing enrollment in KU's Air Force ROTC[97]

Upon entry into the advanced course, a cadet had to sign a contract to continue in the program which required military service after college.[98] However, due to the large number of students who had enrolled in Air Force ROTC nationally and with the end of the war in Korea, there was a national surplus of Air Force ROTC cadets ready to commission in 1954 that the Air Force could not accept.

[97] "USAF STATISTICS." See Footnote 12 for the limitations relating to the data used.
[98] Mitchell, *Air Force Officers: Personnel Policy Development 1944-1974*, 118.

This national surplus in conjunction with a reduction in force would lead to thousands of Air Force ROTC seniors being denied their commission in 1954 and 1955.[99] Air Force ROTC cadets who would not volunteer for flying duties would instead be denied a commission and would instead be given a certificate of completion which would allow them to enlist in the Air Force to complete their active duty service commitment.[100] Only after two years of service as an Airman 3rd Class would they be allowed to receive a commission into the reserve. While many students had joined Air Force ROTC to avoid the draft rather than to commission, there were still some upset cadets. In the *Air Male*, the official KU Air Force ROTC cadet-ran magazine, a full-page article discussed the depression and outrage of cadets in both the December 1953 and April 1954 issues.[101] This depression and outrage came mainly from the fact that if the cadets who received certificates did not enlist, they would be subject to the draft. These cadets had spent three to four years of their life in ROTC to avoid the draft only to be vulnerable to it again.

A combination of overproduction, broken promises, and changing agreements towards the end of the Korean War and shortly after would lead to a quick reduction in ROTC enrollment on KU's campus. While the draft would still be an ever-present concern for students even after the Korean War armistice, there was just not as much of an impetus to use ROTC to avoid the draft. It became a better bet to risk being drafted when compared to ensuring military service by volunteering to be an officer by enrolling in ROTC after the end of the Korean War.

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[99] *United States Air Force Statistical Digest, Fiscal Year 1957*, Twelfth (Washington, D. C.: Directorate of Statistical Services, n.d.), 630, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA551604.
[100] Mitchell, *Air Force Officers: Personnel Policy Development 1944-1974*, 121.
[101] "Big Air Force Shakeup," *Air Male*, April 1954, RG 29/1 ROTC - Air Force Artificial Records 1950s-, Kenneth Spencer Research Library; Phillip Dangerfield, "The Certificate Student-A Brief History," *Air Male*, December 1953, RG 29/1 ROTC - Air Force Artificial Records 1950s-, Kenneth Spencer Research Library.

Conclusion

Students at KU during the early 1950s faced a unique situation. With the Korean War draft threatening their college education and their future life plans, many tried to find a way to gain a deferment from the draft using any method possible. At first, there was not a clear understanding of how the draft was going to work. With the threat of a global war between the United States and the forces of communism, total mobilization was a possibility on the table. While the threat of total mobilization would fade into obscurity along with of the idea of universal military training, partial mobilization was the chosen path that would affect young American men's lives.

By the time of peak ROTC enrollment at KU in 1952, half of the men on campus were deferred by participation in ROTC. This was well over the national average of a quarter of college-aged men deferred by ROTC. While part of this difference comes from KU being one of only a couple dozen schools with all three branches of ROTC on campus, this fact alone cannot explain the difference considering KU did not have mandatory ROTC participation for its underclassmen.

When faced with the draft during the Korean War, KU men looked to the university's faculty to guide them. In the initial semesters after the beginning of the war, KU men were scared about their future and the lack of information exacerbated those fears. KU faculty worked hard to make sure their students could remain in college to get a college education before they were forced to serve their country. Based on the limitations of other draft deferments, university officials at KU settled on recommending ROTC as the preferred method of draft deferment for KU students. While all draft deferments were only advisory, an ROTC draft deferment had the largest chance of being honored by local draft boards. No one could argue against avoiding the draft by participating in ROTC because ROTC in itself was a voluntary military program. While the students

may have voluntarily joined ROTC, they did not have any better option to give themselves the best chance to avoid the draft.

When faced with challenges to the ROTC deferment scheme, university officials fought hard for Henry Laughlin. Their attempts to ensure he kept his deferment would ultimately fail but would show how far they were willing to go to ensure that ROTC deferments remained valid for the rest of the men at KU. In cases like Max Thompson, where his academic draft deferment was not honored by the local draft board, there was nothing that the university administration said about the matter. The administration knew that the other options available for KU men were only advisory and were not going to try to protect them like an ROTC deferment would, even if Laughlin's case showed a possibility otherwise.

By the end of the war, 70.6 percent of college graduates served in the military.[102] With hindsight, it is obvious that KU's men were most likely going to have to serve in the military one way or the other. Considering that ninety percent of college students believed that the deferment they were being given was only a postponement of service during the war, the appeal of ROTC becomes much clearer.[103] ROTC allowed for entry into the military as an officer, which came with better pay and other benefits. It also allowed the students to choose which branch and also have a say in what kind of assignment they wanted to do in the military. The fact that the largest branch on campus was the Air Force ROTC and that most of the cadets opted for non-flying assignments shows how many KU students were trying to go the safest perceived route of military service.

[102] Flynn, "The Draft and College Deferments During the Korean War," 385.
[103] Flynn, 385.

It is important to note that this paper does not argue that every student who joined ROTC at KU did so to avoid the Korean War draft. Two of KU's most successful alumni, NASA astronauts Major General Joe Engle and Captain Ronald Evans, came from KU's Air Force and Navy ROTC units respectively during this period.[104] Both of these gentlemen had long careers in the military and are representative of a portion of KU ROTC graduates. However, most KU men who joined ROTC during the Korean War did so to avoid the draft.

[104] "Biographical Data: Major General Joe H. Engle" (NASA, June 2009), https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/engle_joe.pdf; "Biographical Data: Ronald E. Evans" (NASA, April 1990), https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/evans-ronald.pdf.

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