

# LSU's Military History:

141 Years of the "Ole War Skule"



*The LSU Parade Ground: 75th Anniversary*  
Chancellor Emeritus William E. "Bud" Davis



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*These remarks by Chancellor Davis were prepared for the Campus Diamond Jubilee, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, on the occasion of LSU Salutes, November 10, 2001. They comprise a revision of an earlier presentation he made for LSU Salutes, November 13, 1999.*

There are ghosts on the LSU Parade Ground. You have only to close your eyes, and visions of massed troops in World War II uniforms pass in review—and behind them, bringing up the rear, are long lines of soldiers in LSU gray. These images stretch back over a hundred years, back to a distant past.

This broad, level field in front of Memorial Tower in the heart of the campus, indeed, is hallowed ground—a memorial to the veterans of this nation's armed forces—a place of tribute to absent comrades. It is a place where the past, the present, and the future come together in overlapping generations and overlapping memories.

The newly erected War Memorial was dedicated in October 1998 in a ceremony that featured former President George Bush and a cast and audience of thousands. It stemmed from the vision of two 1942 alumni, Joe Dale and John Capdevielle. They

wanted to commemorate the lives and services of all who had represented LSU in the armed forces in World War II and all conflicts thereafter. The Laborde brothers, John and Lucien (John was winning World War II in the Pacific, while Lucien was landing in Normandy), chaired a committee organized in 1995 to raise the funds and plan the project.

By 1997 the University community, including students, former students, and friends, were cheering the completed Memorial. All were keenly aware that in the ever-unfolding



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years, veterans would be assembling on the LSU Parade Ground to salute that band of brothers and sisters in arms who had served their country so well. It would be a place where old friends could come together to refresh cherished memories and, with renewed vigor, support the endeavors of those generations of students and military leaders yet to come.

It is a special place—this parade ground with the American flag snapping and popping in the breeze—this well-trampled field surrounded by sentinels of live oaks. From the very beginnings of the new campus established on this site in 1926, it has been a landmark and focal point for LSU. It is a sacred place—a place of dreams of things that were and dreams of things that might be—a place where generations of students in times of peace prepared for war and in times of war went forth to lead in every branch of this nation’s armed forces. It will ever be a reminder that students and members of this University community have led and served in every war, from the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 to the present.

From the distant past, from the founding of that primitive seminary that blossomed into a prestigious state university, the military presence has been intertwined with LSU’s great history. That presence also has impacted and helped shape the lives of generations of students representing this revered institution.

Yes, from the day it opened its doors in 1860, Louisiana State University has been influenced by its military tradition. In return, for more than a century, LSU has produced a continuing line of military men and women who have greatly influenced United States military history. This long relationship can be seen in countless symbols, including two Civil War cannons, which were used at Fort Sumter and later presented to the University by General William Tecumseh Sherman. It is represented in the Oak Grove and the 175-foot Memorial Tower honoring LSU students and other Louisianians killed in World War I. It is reflected in the War Memorial flag pole and reviewing stand and wall of honor listing the names of those who died serving our country in World War II and all subsequent wars. The heritage also lives in the tradition of LSU’s Tiger mascot, a remembrance of Wheat’s Tigers (a Louisiana unit that distinguished itself during the Civil War). LSU’s character is steeped in military tradition.

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And while no one is exactly certain how LSU acquired the title—"The Ole War Skule"—a more appropriate name is hard to imagine.

Even before LSU was established, the area in and around Baton Rouge served as host to many historical figures and events. New students arriving on campus in the latter part of the 19th century were made aware of their rich heritage. The following note published in 1896-97, was carried in the University Catalog for nearly a quarter of a century at a time when LSU was located at the Pentagon Barracks in downtown Baton Rouge.

### THE OLE WAR SKULE

*(Taken from the 1896-97 Catalogue of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College)*

The site of the University is historic ground; over it hovers the romance of the struggles of the Great Powers for supremacy in the Mississippi Valley. These extensive grounds and splendid buildings, the princely gift of our national government, were occupied successively by the armed battalions of France, England, Spain, and America.

Here in 1779, Galvez, the Spanish Governor of Louisiana, after three days' battle, captured the British garrison under Colonel Dickinson.

Here, in 1810, Philemon Thomas, with his mixed band of pinewoods men and Ohio flatboat men, captured the Spanish post, killing Grandpré, its commander, and wresting West Florida from Spain.

Here nearly every prominent officer in the United States Army since the Revolution did duty. Wilkinson and the first Wade Hampton, Revolutionary heroes, commanded here, as did afterwards Gaines and Taylor, heroes of the War of 1812.

Here Winfield Scott, the conqueror of Mexico, saw his first service as lieutenant of artillery.

Here Lafayette was received by the military and citizens in 1824, and Andrew Jackson later.

Here was the home of Zachary Taylor, hero of

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Buena Vista, and President of the United States, and of his brilliant son, "Dick," the distinguished Confederate general.

Here, in 1861, the Louisiana State Guard, before the secession of Louisiana, took the garrison and the arsenal, with all their munitions of war, from the United States troops.

Here, in 1862, General Breckinridge, commanding the Confederates, fought a desperate battle with the Union army and navy under Williams and Farragut. Williams was killed, and the Confederate ram, Arkansas, was blown up in full view.

These grounds were trodden by Grant and Lee, Sherman and "Stonewall" Jackson; by McClellan and the Johnstons, Bragg and Rosecrans; by Longstreet and Harney, George H. Thomas and Beauregard; by Forest and Phil. Sheridan, Hardee and Hood; by Hancock and Custer, Admiral Porter and Bishop-General Polk; and by the great civilians, Clay and Calhoun, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis.

"Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standeth is holy.";

**I**n many ways, all of these events merely set the stage for the continuing military saga at LSU. The University had its origins in certain land grants from the U.S. Government in 1806, 1811, and 1827. But the big leap forward came in 1859, when the State's legislators founded the Seminary of Learning of the State of Louisiana and located it at Pineville in Rapides Parish, about four miles from Alexandria.

The first session at the fledgling institution was held on January 2, 1860, on a clear, cold day. William Tecumseh Sherman had been appointed as the school's first Superintendent. He also served as Professor of Engineering. Many of the rules and regulations which became a part of LSU's tradition stem from Sherman's early influence. Educated at West Point, he adopted many of the practices and methods of instruction and discipline used at that school. Thinking at that time was that the new institution should be modeled on a mission similar to that of Virginia Military Institute or the Citadel—a place where leaders were trained.

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In this light, not long after the institution opened its doors as the Seminary of Learning of the State of Louisiana, the Board of Supervisors recommended to the State Legislature that the General Assembly make the school military by law. The Assembly concurred with the proposal and fixed the school's military characteristics by changing the institution's name to Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy.

That early, enthusiastic start, however, was short-lived. Exercises were suspended on April 23, 1861, with the outbreak of the Civil War.

Soon thereafter, Sherman resigned to assume a command of the Union army. In fact, he was the first to leave the Seminary, resigning his post as Superintendent and rejoining the Union army. Within six months, he was to become a brigadier general. Meanwhile, the cadets and most of the faculty joined the ranks of the Confederate army. All of the cadets, except one, went into the service of the Confederacy.

During the war, however, Sherman remembered the seminary. When Union camps occupied the area around Alexandria, where the campus was located at that time, Sherman sent word to the commanders not to destroy or loot any of the buildings.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, on October 20, 1865, exercises were resumed at the Seminary under a former Confederate colonel, David F. Boyd. He ended up serving as head of the institution for more than 20 years, during which time the school was to make the transition from seminary to university.

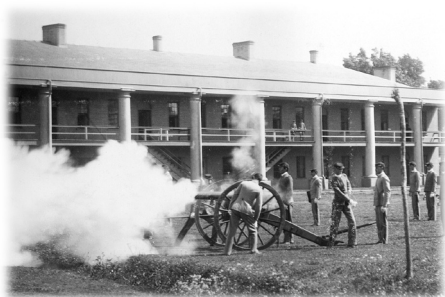
The buildings on the Pineville campus burned down on October 15, 1869, and on November 1 of that year, the institution reopened in Baton Rouge. At the new location, military students marched to classes, and cadet officers reported absences and cases of misconduct. All cadets were required to live in barracks. Also, significantly, the name of the school was changed in 1870 to Louisiana State University.

In 1874, the Louisiana State Agricultural and Mechanical College was established in New Orleans. In 1877, the schools combined to form Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College. The military routine and tradition persisted through all of these changes. In 1879, the first Regular Army officer, Lieutenant Michael F. Jamar, became the first Professor of Military Science and Technology.



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In 1886 Sherman helped the University acquire the use of the Pentagon Barracks, located where the State Capitol grounds are today. Largely through his influence, Congress transferred to LSU the United States Military Post at Baton Rouge. Sherman also arranged



*Andrew D. Lytle Collection, MSS.893, 1254, LLMVC, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA*

for the procurement of two brass cannons from historic Fort Sumter. Today they are located in front of the military building on the present campus.

When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, the University president was Colonel Thomas Boyd (brother of the University's second president, David Boyd, and a member of the first class of the Ole War Skule at the Pineville seminary). Thomas Boyd immediately proposed the organization of a regiment to be composed chiefly of LSU cadets to be known as the University Cadets. About 4,000 volunteered, but the War Department decided it wanted the group to supply 660 enlistees to fill vacancies in the first and second Louisiana regiments. The cadets and former cadets of LSU answered the call.

By 1900 a few students were authorized to take courses without military training, and Baton Rouge students were permitted to live at home. The first woman student was admitted to the University in 1904. Also in 1904 distinguished cadets were first allowed to apply for appointments as second lieutenants in the United States Army.

With the entry of the United States into World War I in April 1917, almost the entire LSU Cadet Corps volunteered. A regiment was designated as "The Louisiana Cadets." A former LSU student, General John A. Lejeune, was the first commander of a Marine Corps combat division and later became Commandant of the United States Marine Corps. Another outstanding LSU cadet of this era was General Campbell B. Hodges. After World War I, he went on to serve as Commandant of the Cadets at the

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U.S. Military Academy at West Point and as military adviser to President Herbert Hoover. (He returned to his alma mater, LSU, as President from 1941-44).

During World War I, scores of former LSU students served their country in all of the branches of the armed services. Following World War I, in 1926, the University moved from its former campus in downtown Baton Rouge to its present location—once a cane field and plantation “way out in the country.” Among the first facilities to be erected was the Memorial Tower, dedicated to the memory of all Louisianians who gave their lives during World War I. In addition, the Oak Grove (now separated from the Parade Ground by the Student Union) was planted to honor those LSU students who died in World War I. This grove of trees consists of 31 massive live oaks, 30 of which are dedicated to 30 known LSU servicemen and one to an unknown University soldier.



**D**uring World War II, LSU was one of the top four schools producing officers for the U.S. Armed Forces. (The other schools were Texas A&M, West Point, and Annapolis). LSU had more than 5,000 former students serving as officers, including 16 who reach the rank of Brigadier General or higher. In all, 12,000 individuals from LSU served, and over 500 died in this great conflict.

Many former LSU cadets and ROTC instructors brought recognition and honor to the University in World War II. These included Major General Claire N. Chennault, famous leader of the Flying Tigers and later commander of the 14th Air Force. General Joseph Collins became Chief of Staff of the Army. Major General Sanderford Jarman (Commandant of the LSU cadets in 1916-17) was instrumental in reorganizing the defense of the Panama Canal immediately prior to World War II. DeLesseps



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Morrison, the United States Ambassador to the Organization of American States, held the rank of Brigadier General in the Army Reserve.

Again, as in World War I, LSU was well represented in the Marine Corps. General Erskine Graves commanded a Marine Division at Iwo Jima. Private Milton Womack (who was to become a member of the LSU Board of Supervisors) fought on Iwo's sandy beaches. Marine Lieutenant Robert Barrow accepted the surrender of Japanese forces in the interior of China.

And while he was never a cadet at LSU, Troy Middleton (who graduated from nearby Mississippi State University and was commissioned in the Army) added to the military lore of LSU where, before the war, he had served as Commandant of Cadets from 1930-36. During World War II, he went on active duty as a battalion commander. Later, as an instructor at the Command and General Staff College, he taught Dwight D. Eisenhower. In the spring of 1944, General Middleton was placed in command of the 8th Army Corps.

Highlights of the 8th Corps' operations were the landing and breakout from the Cherbourg Peninsula, the capture of Brest, and the Battle of the Bulge. During that historic campaign, General George Patton called Middleton's grim determination and decision to hold Bastogne "a stroke of genius." At the conclusion of the war, Middleton returned to academic life, serving as LSU's president from 1951-61.

LSU ROTC graduates continued to contribute significant numbers of regular and reserve officers in the Korean conflict and Vietnam. Among them was the aforementioned Robert Barrow, hero of Inchon and Chosin during the Korean War. Barrow rose to the rank of General and went on to become LSU's second Commandant of the Marine Corps. (He was awarded an honorary doctorate at LSU at the 1990 Commencement.)

In 1969, in response to a national movement among land-grant universities to drop mandatory ROTC requirements for freshmen and sophomore male students, LSU followed suit. From that day forward, all men and women in the Army and Air Force ROTC units at LSU have been volunteers who have taken on the burden of our nation's defense of their own free will. As the military is a cross-section of our nation, these cadets represent students in almost every academic discipline and almost every aspect of campus life. They come from all walks of life, all sectors

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of society, and all parts of our state and country. They are our neighbors, our friends, our brothers and sisters, our children. And what they have in common is that they all, each in his or her own way, voluntarily serve in our nation's armed forces.

Carrying on a great tradition, more recently, individuals from LSU served in the active, reserve, and National Guard forces in the Grenada and Panama campaigns and the Gulf War. In Desert Storm, LSU alumnus General Thomas Rhame, led the Army's 1st Division, the Big Red One, into combat and conducted the first attack to penetrate Iraqi positions.

At the time of the first LSU Salutes ceremony in November 1995, the University could boast of 18 flag officers on active duty, including Lieutenant General Edgar R. Anderson Jr., who served as the Surgeon General of the Air Force. Among the military leaders to visit the campus in the mid-nineties was Marine Corps Major General Ron Richard, at that time Commanding General of Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, a base named for a former LSU student and Commandant of the Marine Corps.

As Chancellor and member of the LSU community, I particularly remember the Gulf War, which broke out on my watch. Numerous members of the faculty, staff, and student body who were in the reserves or National Guard were called to active duty with their units. More than 500 members of the LSU academic community participated, many going overseas. I shall never forget the photograph that appeared on the front pages of newspapers across the country—a picture of a soldier writing home with a large purple and gold LSU flag in the background. When the hostilities ended, he returned to LSU and resumed his education—just like former students in the service have done since the beginnings of this University.

**A**s an educator and a veteran of the Korean War, I share and admire the views of John Gardner, one of the great philosophers of the 20th century. In writing about our national heritage and moral values, Gardner pointed out that our great heritage is “not something static, not something enshrined in historic documents, nor stowed away like the family silver. It is a living, changing thing, and never any better than the generation that holds it in its trust.”

Gardner then went on to say:

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Helping each generation to rediscover the meaning of liberty, justice—"the words on the monuments"—is a perennial task for any society. Each generation is presented with victories it did not win for itself. A generation that has fought for freedom may pass that freedom on to the next generation. But it cannot pass on the intense personal knowledge of what it takes in courage and endurance to win that freedom.

This concern about each generation learning the meaning of freedom was also what the news analyst and broadcaster Tom Brokaw was talking about in his superb book, *The Greatest Generation*. After covering the 50th anniversary of the Normandy landing on "D" Day in June 1944, Brokaw was moved to tell the story of a generation of America's heroes and heroines who came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War and went on to build modern America. He wrote of a generation that was "united not only by a common purpose, but also by common values—duty, honor, economy, courage, service, love of family and country, and, above all else, responsibility for oneself."

And then, after this "greatest generation" had won the war and saved the world, Brokaw tells about them coming home and rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted. He credits a grateful nation with making it possible through the G.I. Bill for more of them to attend college than any other society had ever educated, anytime, anywhere. He reports that "They gave the world new science, literature, art, industry, and economic strength unparalleled in the long curve of history."

Proudly, many from LSU were part of this "greatest generation." For those who with honor have served this nation over many years and in many wars—for those who in times of peace have done their "hitch"—for them there will echo and re-echo those words on the monuments: Duty, Honor, Country. And, for a special, privileged few: LSU. For them, as they stand on the LSU Parade Ground while the images and ghosts of generations of student soldiers pass in review, that old adage in those early University catalogs holds true: "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standeth is holy."

*Photos courtesy of LSU University Relations*

*The historical notes for this speech were taken from a composite of speeches prepared for me at various times when, as Chancellor, I addressed the ROTC cadets. Especially, the materials prepared for me by Air Force Colonel Paul L. Jacobs and his staff were most helpful.*

*“Bud” Davis*



Cadets of the Ole War Skule, Memorial Tower  
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
225-578-0420, Email: [cadets@lsu.org](mailto:cadets@lsu.org)  
[www.olewarskule.lsu.edu](http://www.olewarskule.lsu.edu)