



Former Gov. Anderson Recalls ROTC Days

by Don Follett (A'56)

(Editor's Note: This is another in a series about past U of M graduates who were also in ROTC as they reflect on their experiences.)

Former Minnesota Governor and U Regent Wendell Anderson enrolled at the U in the post World War II/ Korean conflict era when ROTC programs were flourishing.

He selected AFROTC, which had just been launched in 1949 and at a time when the initial popularity to join the wing raised its ranks to several hundred. Three years into the program, he joined other juniors who went to Ellsworth AFB, SD, for summer training where an eye exam determined he had a slight stigmatism. Since the AFROTC program was already oversubscribed, the health defect would mean he wouldn't be retained in the program.

"Later, another doctor gave me a clean bill of health," remembers Anderson, "but in the meantime I was on my way out of AFROTC." Unfortunately, the U's Air Force Professor of Military Science had been reassigned earlier that summer, and was unable to provide the continuity that might have help retain Anderson in the wing that fall.

"In those days there was a military draft, and I joined ROTC since I wanted to serve in the military as an officer," said Anderson, "so I transferred to Army ROTC. That's many years ago now, of course, but I vividly recall the instructors, as many were WW II combat veterans."

As a result of the transfer, Anderson was required to attend an AROTC summer camp, this one at Fort Riley, KS basic infantry training base. As a college athlete, Anderson found "the physical part of the training light", he remembers, and did fine with the other military subjects.

Upon graduation in 1954 he was commissioned in the Infantry branch and later assigned to Ft. Banks, MA. In those years, the military saw the morale value in showcasing athletes within units. In other cases, the Army was accommodating in freeing amateur athletes to compete for their country on the world stage. As a recent hockey standout at the U, Anderson and others were given an opportunity to try out for the US Hockey team. He made it

and later played in the 1956 Olympics, alongside former Gopher hockey great and teammate John Mayasich who had also earned an ROTC commission. "I was lucky," Anderson says now.

In reflection, Anderson would readily recommend national service for young people. "I think for young men a compulsory tour of commitment to your country—whether it be through something like ROTC, peace corps, the old CCC or something similar—would would be good."

The personnel needs of the Army had diminished in the wake of the Korean conflict, and Anderson and other lieutenants were discharged from active duty early. To fulfill a Reserve obligation, Anderson was assigned to the 360th Psychological Operations reserve unit at Ft. Snelling, a unit that former U of M graduate and colleague Chuck Mencil also served. That assignment brought Anderson to a variety of active duty posts for annual training, including Ft. Bragg, NC.

In 1958, while still in law school, Anderson was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives, and was re-elected in 1960, the same year he graduated from the U's law school.

As a young legislator his leadership qualities thrust him into growing responsibilities. He was elected to the state Senate in 1962 and 1966, and was selected as one of two outstanding Minnesota legislators by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. He also served as chairman of the Minnesota Humphrey for President Campaign in 1968.

In 1970, at age 38, Anderson was elected governor of Minnesota, among the youngest in its history. Re-elected governor in 1974, he resigned in Dec 1986 to accept appointment to the US Senate seat vacated by Walter F. Mondale after his election as vice-president. Anderson continued to serve the U and is a former member of the Board of Regents.

From his early years, he remains loyal to his East Side St. Paul roots and to his alma mater Johnson High School where an AFROTC program has recently been installed. He was saluted in April as an "Outstanding Alumnus", having already been installed as a member of its Hall of Fame, which also honors former U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger, former Congressman Bruce Vento and Herb Brooks, hockey coach of the 1980 US Olympic Hockey champions. At age 75, Anderson remains active, serving as an arbitrator and mediator with the Gilbert Mediation Center and also is seen on KSTP-TV as a political commentator.