



Man turns dream into reality as he graduates with ring

By **KIMBERLY BRANDT**
 After two years of preparing himself and four grueling years of study and training, Jacob Leichliter of Clayton has the bars of a second lieutenant and a class ring to show that he graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy.



Lt. Leichliter

Lt. Leichliter met with the Oberlin Rotary Club last Tuesday to show the group what he has been up to for the last four years.

He said it was a great feeling to know that he had a town behind him. When things got tough at the academy, he remembered he was there learning to keep people at home safe.

He opened the luncheon program Tuesday at The Gateway with a video called the "Pursuit of Excellence," which showed the academy grounds, from dorms to the famous chapel.

Lt. Leichliter said the academy is a great place. It put him through some of the hardest times he has had in his life to date, though he joked that he is not yet married and hasn't raised any kids. The academy, he said, taught him things he never thought he would learn.

He said he started the process that led him to the academy during his junior year at Decatur Community High School. He said he had to take an admissions test and also had to have a congressional nomination. Although he met with Rep. Jerry Moran, he did not get a nomination from him. As it turned out, though, he received nominations from both Senators Pat Roberts and Sam Brownback.

Even though he had the nomination, he said, he still hadn't heard whether or not he had been accepted. He received a Reserve Officers Training Corps scholarship for the Air Force and was ready to sign it when the academy acceptance came in.

The first year at the academy, the students are known as doolies and are taught how to be officers. Each student is given a book called "Contraails," he said, and it has to be memorized that first year. It has several things in it, from quotes to military protocol.

For the first three weeks, the freshmen are in basic training, which is three weeks in the dorms learning how to be in the military. Then they go to Jack's Valley, which is on the academy property in the foothills near Colorado Springs.

There, said Lt. Leichliter, the doolies were pushed to the extremes of their physical endurance. He said there was a certain energy and sense of accomplishment at the end. Lt. Leichliter said he wasn't ready to go back to the hill where the dorms are to start classes at the end of the three weeks.

After basic freshman year started, he said, the schedule each day was for breakfast to start at 6:50 a.m. All 4,000 students ate in 20 minutes to-

gether, then it was time to head off to class, then formation, lunch and more classes until 3:30 p.m. Every day after class, said Lt. Leichliter, they had physical training.

As he talked, he showed slides of his fellow cadets in the dorm, in Jack's Valley and at different functions.

Lt. Leichliter said he spent four years with his class, and they are like brothers and sisters now.

After the first year, he said, training takes a spin, because by the senior year he was one of the cadets running the squadron.

The first semester of his senior year, Lt. Leichliter was a member of the squadron staff as the human relations officer. He said he was responsible for the social environment and was trained how to help out with any crisis.

His second semester, he was a flight commander directly responsible for over 30 cadets, helping them to develop into better officers.

The academic standards at the academy are amazing, he said. The biggest difference between the academy and a regular university is that the teachers are there to help the students, not for themselves.

During the last two years, he said, he started to play rugby and thinks he has found his passion.

There were also religious benefits, he said. Especially during basic training, people from Colorado Springs came in to make sure that every religion was taken care of.

"If it wasn't for God," said Lt. Leichliter, "there is no way I would have made it through the academy, or to it."

Now that graduation is over, he was back in Kansas to help out with harvest and see his father, Dennis Leichliter of Clayton. Before coming home, he went to Alaska for two weeks to visit with his mother, Beth Jones, and see as much of the state as possible. He said he sister Stacey is in college in Rolla, Mo.

On Friday, he will leave for Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, where he will attend a seven-week school on space and missiles. Part way through, he will make a career decision. Lt. Leichliter said most likely he will go into missiles.

He said he wanted to fly, but Air Force said no.

The lieutenant said he owes five years to the Air Force to pay for the education he received at the academy. He hasn't decided if he will just stay for those five years or for another 20 and make the Air Force a career.

With a degree in history, he said, if he doesn't stay in the Air Force until retirement, he has thought of teaching.

Lt. Leichliter said he owes the community a big thanks for the support he has received. He said the education he received in Oberlin schools helped prepare him for the classes he took at the academy.

AT THE SCOTTISH FESTIVAL in Estes Park, Clayton's Jacob Leichliter participated in the color guard.



2NDLT. JACOB LEICHLITER



2NDLT. JACOB LEICHLITER saluted his classmates and fellow officers after he received his diploma.



AFTER GRADUATION at the Air Force Academy on May 28 in Colorado Springs, 977 graduates threw their caps in the air as the Thunderbirds Precision Flying Team flew overhead.