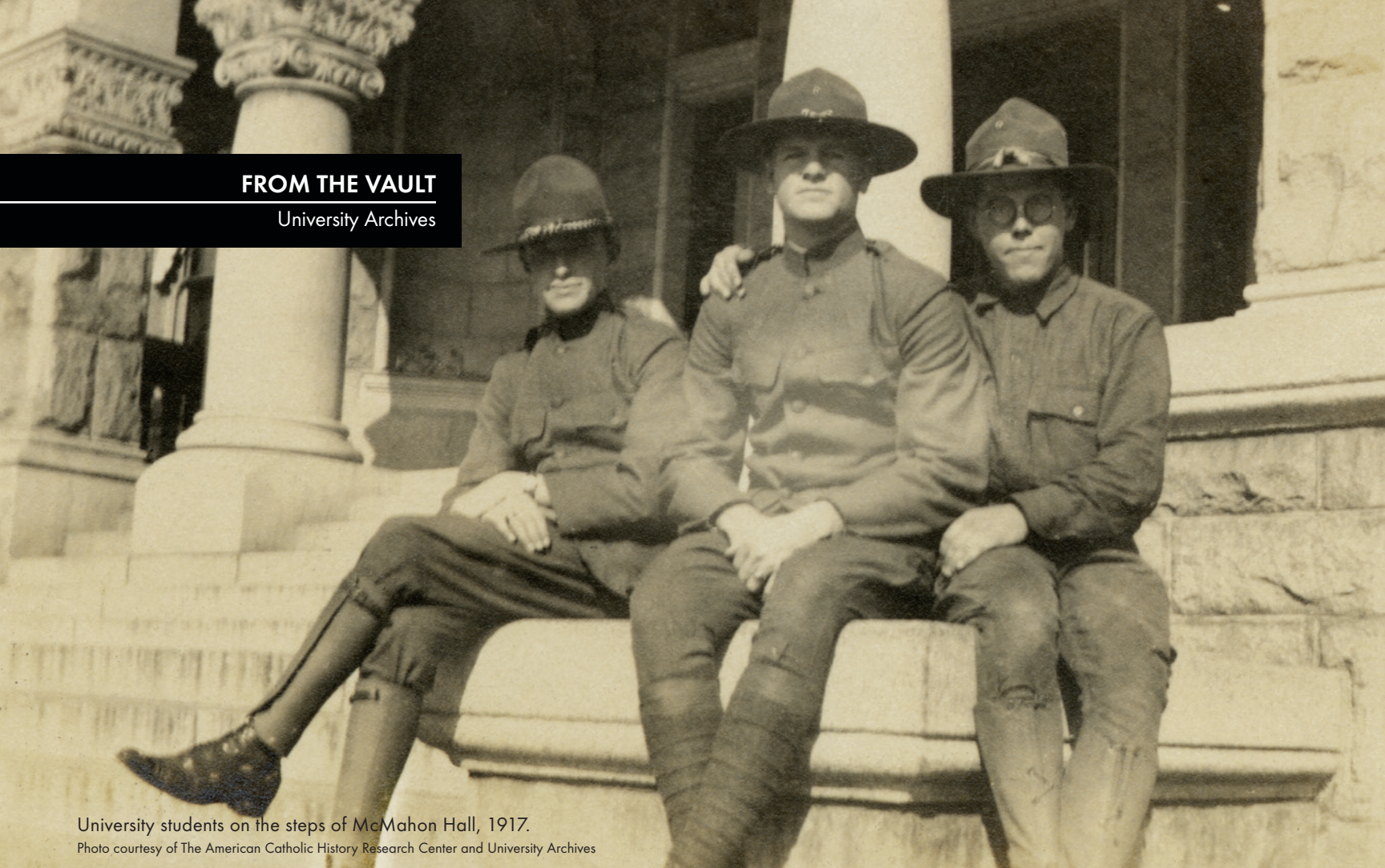


FROM THE VAULT

University Archives



University students on the steps of McMahon Hall, 1917.

Photo courtesy of The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives

Catholic University Answered the Call

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered the First World War, joining Britain and France against Imperial Germany. Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, rector of Catholic University, wrote to President Woodrow Wilson on March 28, before the declaration of war, offering “such services as the Government of the United States may desire.” President Wilson replied two days later expressing thanks “for your pledge of cooperation and support.”

The University would prove to be as good as Bishop Shahan’s word. Lay students began military drilling on campus, forming three companies led by University instructors with prior military experience. Many students also joined both reserve and active duty units. The U.S. War Department inaugurated the Student Army Training Corps (SATC), the forerunner to today’s ROTC. The SATC used more than 100 college campuses as training facilities for new military personnel, including nearly 400 Catholic University students. The University’s Rev. Peter Guilday served as one of the SATC regional vice directors. The University promoted Liberty Loan subscriptions to help fund the war effort and permitted the Navy to use two campus buildings as a paymaster training school. The Army used the Maloney Hall laboratory for chemical

research, developing Lewisite gas, which was never used in the war effort.

In August 1917, the American bishops founded the National Catholic War Council (NCWC), forerunner to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, on Catholic University’s campus to provide comfort to servicemen and to demonstrate the Church’s loyalty to the nation. Under the motto “For God and Country,” the NCWC was led by alumnus Rev. John Burke.

By war’s end, some 800 alumni and students had served in the military; 15 made the ultimate sacrifice, including Edward L. Killion, editor of the Cardinal yearbook’s first issue in 1916. More than 50 priest-alumni served as chaplains. The University’s postwar efforts included a rehabilitation school for wounded soldiers, administration of the Knights of Columbus scholarships for veterans, and a 1922 campus memorial to honor the University’s fallen.

— Adapted from “The Archivist’s Nook: Catholic University Declares War,” a blog by William Shepherd, associate archivist at the American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.

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