

By Larry Phillips • Daily Leader They were historic generals – Grant, Patton and MacArthur – and if a Liberal teen has his way, he wants to attain the same rank if not the same greatness.



Since starting down a path he chose two years ago, the first major hurdle has been cleared. Tyler Sutherland, an 18-year-old senior at Liberal High School, has received his official letter of acceptance to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

“I’ve been appointed, accepted, medically cleared – I’m in,”

Sutherland said, with a beaming smile.

Military life runs throughout Sutherland’s family – his father, all his uncles and even grandparents have served in the Army.

“Actually, a few have been in the Air Force, but most have been in the Army,” Sutherland said. “I have always wanted to go there.”

In the summer between Sutherland’s sophomore and junior years at LHS, he attended a Hugh O’Brien Youth World Leadership program. There, he met several people who were in the military, and he discovered just what West Point could do to further his dream of becoming an Army soldier and officer.

“I knew that’s where I was supposed to go,” he explained.

Then the laborious process of applying to the nation's oldest military college began.

"There were all kinds of applications on the Internet, just to let them know you're interested," he said. "You apply to the college, and they kind of pigeonhole your application until your senior year."

But the process still trudges on.

"Then you have to start contacting all your congressmen, senators – even the vice president if you want to," Sutherland said. "Thank goodness, I didn't have to go that route."

Then Sutherland had to apply for a nomination.

"Through that process, you have to write countless numbers of essays," he said, adding three people – his counselor, Vivian Dirks, someone from the community and a teacher had to write a letter of recommendation to each of the congressmen.

After that, he had to fill out a packet of information that was about an inch-and-a-half thick for both Representative Jerry Moran and Senator Pat Roberts.

"That was time consuming, but it was worth it," Sutherland said.

Then meetings were set up for interviews with Moran's and Roberts'

nominating selection committees.

His meeting with Moran's committee was scheduled in the representative's Wichita office.

"Jerry Moran had a panel of 16 different people in his choosing committee. They were broken up into four different rooms, and you would go to each different room, and they'd ask you all kinds of questions," Sutherland said. "Questions ranging from, 'Why did I want to do it? Who was inspirational in my life? and What political views did I have?' – just questions about anything you can imagine.

"It was a lot of fun," he added.

Roberts' committee was in Dodge City, and there were only two women involved in his questioning.

"They were great. They made me feel very welcome," Sutherland said.

When asked if it was difficult having to spend two years getting to this point, Sutherland smiled and said, "It's been awhile."

He related one application he did online took nearly five days to complete.

"There was three different essays I had to write – all about military- type things," he said, adding he didn't have to bone up much on military history.

"I've always been a military buff, and I always loved World War II,"

Sutherland said. "I could read about that war forever."

Sutherland produced his diploma-style acceptance portfolio from West Point and his official acceptance letter. He explained he was fortunate in receiving three appointments, two from Roberts' office and one from Moran's. He had also previously received a letter of acceptance from West Point – contingent on his interviews and appointment and being medically accepted.

“That was also a huge relief,” he said with a grin. “I was pretty proud of that.”

He is still waiting on his orders when to report to West Point, but he thinks it will be near the last week of June (he graduates with the LHS Class of 2009 in May) where he will go into boot camp.

“Then directly after boot camp, I start my classes,” Sutherland said.

“From the time I leave for boot camp, I will have no contact with the outside world until the end of my first semester. There is a parents’

day in October, but other than that, there’s no contact with anybody else outside of campus.

“So, that will be kind of interesting,” he added.

Sutherland, the son of Travis and Tammy Abbott, is a member of the National Honor Society and is near the top of his class. He has also been involved in sports at LHS, playing football and wrestling, and he plans on trying out for the historic Army football squad.

“Yes, I plan on playing football,” he said. “That should be fun. I’m a big fan of the Army-Navy game – I’ve watched it since I was little.

It’s intense. Navy has been getting them as of late, so maybe I can help out a little bit.”

When Sutherland graduates from West Point, he will be a first lieutenant – an officer. He is also obligated to serve an additional five years in the Army, but that doesn't bother Sutherland.

"I'm wanting to make a career out of this," he said. "It's been my dream since I was little to become a general. I always looked up to generals such as Patton, Grant and MacArthur."