Bearings: Spring 2016
The George Washington University Naval Reserve Office Training Corps

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It is my honor and privilege to serve as BCO of the GWU NROTC battalion this semester. The mission of my staff and I is to facilitate the basic purpose of the NROTC program: “to develop midshipmen mentally, morally, and physically.” As junior officers in the Navy and Marine Corps, we will undoubtedly face challenges for which there are no easy answers. We will rely on the ethical foundations we create here to properly uphold the oath we take upon commissioning. With this in mind, I have placed special emphasis on the moral aspect of our mission in crafting my command philosophy, Principled Leadership.

Over the course of our lives, we develop a set of moral principles to guide our decision-making. It is absolutely critical for us as future Marine and Naval officers to begin this process during training, before we enter our chosen profession. We are beholden to an institution that represents the collective values of our country. My focus on Principled Leadership should reinforce the commitment each midshipman makes when agreeing to serve.

The three principles I believe are most integral to this purpose are Accountability, Integrity, and Maturity. We are all held responsible for our performance at all times. We will embody high moral character and adherence to the honor code. And we should acknowledge our duty as leaders to constantly set the example for both our peers and the Americans we lead. Through presentations by distinguished guest speakers, community service, General Military Training, and frequent ethical discussions, we will all receive valuable guidance to lead us into our next year with a more advanced understanding of ourselves and the military ethos.

We are fortunate to have dedicated midshipmen from all different backgrounds to contribute to this effort. Learn, improve, and finish the semester strong.

Semper Fidelis.

MIDN 1/C Costello, USMCR
The George Washington University’s proximity to Marine Corps Base Quantico, Camp Upshur, provides us a unique opportunity to train in an environment that reflects what’s to come at OCS. During my 4/C year, moving to attend my first Field Exercise (FEX) at Camp Upshur, I was nervous about what I had gotten myself into. As a freshman, not yet in the best shape of my life, with new boots that didn’t fit my feet just right, each phase of our training at Camp Upshur seemed to bring a new, insurmountable hell to trudge through: climbing over bars, scaling logs and walls and ropes with acrobatics that I had not attempted since I was a child…then the hike, all with upperclassman Marine Options and Marines yelling and chiding me for my failures. I remember falling asleep instantly on the ride back to campus, shuffling home with dark purple bruises, bloody socks, and blisters the size of my ankles. I never wanted to relive such humiliation. Luckily, as a freshman, time was in my favor. There was time to heal, time to train, and more than anything, time to improve.

Our most recent FEX presented a chance to bring new strength and knowledge to the field- and hopefully get some redemption. Where I had struggled (and failed) over and over again on every obstacle of the O-course as a 4/C, I moved through each phase with ease, successfully completing each obstacle, most on the first try, and all at least once, then going back to practice multiple times. I still struggle to run down the logs after the parallel bars, but now that my weakness has been isolated, I can focus on correcting my form, trusting my feet, and surmounting the challenge. And, where last year, hiking with a pack had seemed impossible, that surely my short legs would break at such a speed, my pace had improved with practice, and the unit stayed together. I still returned home to bloody socks and bruises, but I slept well that Friday night, knowing that progress is possible.

Recognizing personal growth and striving to grow continuously should make the foundation of our training as Midshipmen, and of our lives and our careers. We receive briefs educating us on the proper way to set goals, constant reminders to carry ‘note-taking gear’, and clearly-defined ‘learning objectives’ in every lecture. We are encouraged to comprehend every experience as an opportunity to learn. But, lecture halls and padded chairs never quite demonstrate the mental fortitude that it takes to jump at a wall over and over again, and fail each time, but to keep jumping. Finally, when you can scale the wall, you’ll be able to show your bruised arm and say, it was never for lack of trying…then go jump over some hurtles and hit the double bars and climb the rope. And after I reach the other side, I’ll be ready to do it again, faster.
At its core, studying abroad sounds simple: to take classes in a foreign country. In reality, the actual academic coursework is only a small portion of the study abroad experience. Through the hard-work and dedication of many people, including current and former members of the unit staff and the Naval Service Training Command, I had the opportunity of a lifetime to study for entire academic year in Madrid, Spain. During this past year, I have gone time and time again outside my comfort zone, experienced a completely different world, and met amazing people, all while taking courses that are making me a better Naval Officer for the future.

From the days of candidacy onwards, we as midshipman strive to fulfill the mission of the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps. At its core, NROTC seeks “to develop midshipmen mentally, morally and physically [...] in order to commission college graduates as naval officers who possess a basic professional background.” Midshipmen in study abroad programs do not have the same opportunities as midshipmen in the battalion to build professionally and since we are removed from battalion activities, I didn’t think I would have the same opportunities to grow as a future officer. Going into this year, I found myself wondering what this experience would be like and how NSTC could believe study abroad fell along the lines of our NROTC mission statement.

After one week in Madrid, this question was answered. As I said in my opening sentence, study abroad is so much more than just taking classes in a foreign country. In the George Washington University’s Madrid Study Abroad program, I take classes at the same university King Felipe VI (the current King of Spain) attended, I live with a Spanish host family, I have toured a Spanish naval station and went aboard a submarine and a couple surface ships in port, I am constantly immersed in a different culture and language wherever I go, and so much more. Each day, my life abroad aligns incredibly well with the NROTC mission and is absolutely amazing.

To develop mentally, a huge factor in studying abroad is expanding your horizons. I’ve found each day to be a new adventure, which frankly makes every day better than the last. At the same time, however, living abroad is not simply a vacation. For non-native speakers, being dropped in a foreign country makes communication and life in general more difficult. Whilst living here, I have gained a stronger foundation for the ideas of positivity and dedication to overcome any obstacle. As long as you put everything you have into every day and walk with a smile on your face, you will ultimately succeed and grow as a person. As the Latin phrase goes, “Ad Astra, per Aspera,” meaning to the stars through difficulties.
To develop morally, life in a foreign country makes you accept a completely different culture. While Spain is a western civilization, everything from the intonation in people’s voices to basic manners are completely different. Because our Navy is a forward deployed force, we will come into contact with other cultures regularly. Being here has given me new insight on how to effectively engage with new people and cultures.

Developing physically was also an interesting change of pace. While in the Unit, the always looming physical readiness test and the competitive camaraderie of the battalion gives you the motivation to be physically fit. In Spain, one must self-motivate themselves to continue staying active. While running around the reflecting pool or through the monuments in Washington are exceptional fitness routes, I found the idea of running through El Retiro, a once royal garden now turned central park style national park, an incredible experience that rivals Washington. But while doing a normal workout is great, it’s not necessarily Spanish. Study abroad is about accepting a foreign culture, and as such I found an additional physical activity; Flamenco.

The dance style flamenco dates back many centuries and is deeply embedded in Spanish culture. After taking Flamenco on a whim last semester, I promptly re-signed up for my second semester. As a 6’1, long and lanky 20 year old, elegant dancing does not necessarily come natural to me. Dancing alongside a partner, alternating heel and toe strikes while simultaneously moving your arms and hands separately, is as much a physical work out as a mental one, but is incredibly fun overall. Maybe this mental exercise of doing one thing with my legs, another with my arms, and thinking all the time will help me in my future naval career. Only time will tell.

In all, while you’re away from the unit, studying abroad is a great opportunity to grow as a midshipman. Each tenant of the NROTC mission statement is exemplified through my program. The experiences I have had the incredible privilege of participating in over here have developed me greatly as a person, and have aided towards my development in becoming a naval officer.

As I wrap up my final semester in Madrid, I remember all of the great life experiences I’ve had with amazing people from GW and from Spain. I encourage anyone who has the opportunity, to study abroad. It was an amazing experience with amazing people in an amazing place. Go Navy, and Hala Madrid!

If you have any questions regarding study abroad, you can reach Sam at: samhardgrove@gwu.edu
From February 25th through 28th I had the honor of attending the Notre Dame Leadership Weekend in South Bend, Indiana along with MIDN Tunney, Webb, McDonald, Cunnings and LT Cordial. The theme of this year’s Naval Leadership Weekend was “One Team, One Fight”, and thus focused on how different communities within the Sea Services can work together and professionally train Naval Officers to the highest standards of personal leadership. During the conference we heard from several different flag officers, a Junior Officer panel, a senior enlisted Marine, a former Commanding Officer of the USS Samuel B. Roberts, and the Notre Dame Director of Gameday Operations.

During the conference, MIDN Cunning was given the opportunity to ask MGEN James Lukeman (Commanding General of Marine Corps Training and Education Command) about gender integration in combat arms MOS’s. Given MGEN Lukeman’s position as the top Marine Corps officer in charge of training, he was perfectly suited to update the assembled MIDN on the progress the Marine Corps is making to allow women into combat roles without jeopardizing performance and mission completion. He stated that the Marine Corps is actively pursuing gender integration in all MOS’s, and is currently studying the effect of women in combat roles. Besides listening to several speakers, the assembled midshipmen were given several opportunities to discuss the speeches, as well as engage in ethical decision making games. We also had the change to meet midshipmen from across the country, exposing us to a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints.

Throughout the conference, one common theme struck me as the most important lesson in leadership development, especially leadership in the military. Repeated by multiple speakers and alluded to by others, was the need to focus on the men and women under your command. Focusing on your troops is the crucial step in not only achieving mission accomplishment, but also in fostering a working environment in which trust and respect is earned. In order to develop a well functioning team, whether in a platoon, a division, a ship, or an army, one needs several main characteristics, including respect, accountability, communication, and a goal. I am confident in saying that this conference helped develop me personally as a leader, and would highly recommend midshipmen in our unit to continue to attend this conference in upcoming years.
This summer I had the privilege of participating in Project G.O. to Amman, Jordan. Project Global Officer is a DoD initiative that allows ROTC members of all branches to spend a summer studying a language and culture of strategic importance. This initiative is meant to keep future officers prepared for the effect of globalization. In our society it is imperative that our future leaders have the tools and knowledge to thrive in any environment. The most important of these tools is language.

My program was a two-month long immersion into both the Arabic language as well as the vibrant culture of the Middle East. I attended classes at the Qasid Arabic Institute in Amman where I took a full year worth of intensive Arabic. While these classes undoubtedly helped my linguistic skills, the real benefit of the trip came from my interaction with the people of Jordan.

Not only was I able to gain confidence in my Arabic speaking skills, but I was also able to gain an intimate perspective on many issues that plague the Middle East. Many of my neighbors were refugees from various countries and each had a story they were eager to tell. As an international affairs major, these first person sources captivated my attention with their perspectives, opinions and experiences.

This trip helped me to develop both cultural knowledge and understanding that is required as an future officer when intermingling with people of different cultures. Due to the global nature of the US military, it is imperative that our officer corps understands the basics of how to interact with a local populous. From my neighbors to my Jordanian friends, the constant exposure to a foreign environment taught me how to build cross-cultural bridges. Even though I only spend two months living amongst these people, friendships that will last a lifetime were founded.

In today's world, it is very easy to fall into the 'western bubble' trap. Where one is only able to see the world through an American lens. As citizens of the world, and as future officers of a global force, we must do everything we can to break this paradigm. Not only should we attempt to remove any bias from our perspective, but at every opportunity attempt to see the environment from a divergent view. Because what you see, might just surprise you.
On February 23, I had the privilege of selecting the USS Shiloh out of Yokosuka, Japan. I’d be lying if I said I had some grand attachment to that particular ship; it was, in fact, an unsuccessful attempt to be on the same ship as MIDN Cotie (who ended up at the same port on the USS Antietam). Lucky for me, I have heard nothing but good things about the ship from others who have been there (and through Facebook stalking, because let’s be real, all the SWO selects did it).

I was adamant that I would go to Yokosuka. When I first joined ROTC, I had one plan: become a SWO, go to Japan, let everything else fall into place. Of course, along the way plans changed; everyone who knows me is probably aware that I wanted to join the Submarine force. People seem to think that I would/ought to be crushed by my rejection from the Sub fleet (and I was disappointed), but in reality, I just went back to my first plan, the plan that involved what I really wanted from the Navy. When I joined, I wanted to see the world and go places I never would have gone otherwise. Japan, China, Bahrain, anywhere in the world that people don’t normally think to go. In large part, this is due to being a Navy brat myself. I had the opportunity to live on both coasts of the United States and in Germany, and as hard as it is to leave your friends and move to a new place, I wouldn’t give up the experiences I had for anything. To me one of the greatest things the Navy offers to its members is the opportunity to see the world and broaden their horizons. What better way to build a global network of allies then to foster understanding of different cultures, and what better way to understand others than to visit their countries?

This assignment is everything I hoped for. It is really a unique opportunity, and I can’t wait to get there.
In order from the left: MIDN Weinhardt, CAPT Wyatt, MIDN Blankenship, Cotei, Dobbs, and Skruzna receiving news of their ship selection results.
For many years the GWUNROTC midshipman have participated in fundraising activities through our consortium school the University of Maryland. This is their last year as a part of the GWU Battalion and we are seeking other ways to raise money for the Unit. The associate provost for military and veteran's affairs has developed a way for alumni to provide tax deductible donations to the unit! We would greatly appreciate any donation to help us fund programs and events that aid in our training. If you would like to donate now, or sometime in the future, please see the options listed below. Thank you.

Ways to Donate:
1. Make a check out to NROTC FUND and send it to:
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