Greetings from Foggy Bottom! The First Class midshipmen have received their service assignments, finals have begun, and the holiday season is upon us. We said farewell to the graduating class of 2015 and welcomed a new class future young leaders into the unit. In addition to the normal cycle of change, the Unit staff has undergone tremendous turnover. Seventy-five percent of the military staff turned over this summer and this trend will continue into next semester. Our new Commanding Officer, CAPT James Wyatt will arrive in January after finishing a tour at the Pentagon as Deputy Director of Navy Staff. In addition, we’ve welcomed Capt Culbertson as the new Marine Officer Instructor (MOI) who arrived from I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) at Camp Pendleton; CA, MSgt Houston as the new Assistant MOI (AMOI) from Legal Services at I MEF; LT Arnest as the Nuclear Power Officer and Second Class Advisor from US Naval Forces, Central Command; and LT Cordial as the Administrative Office from the USS San Jacinto.

For those of you whom I haven’t met, I’m CDR Ross Piper, the new Executive Officer and acting Commanding Officer until CAPT Wyatt’s arrival. My predecessor, CDR Wennersten hasn’t gone far as he was selected to help start up the new NROTC Unit at University of Maryland and University of Maryland, Baltimore County. My family and I arrived to the DC area this June after completing a joint overseas tour with the US Air Force and NATO. An EP-3 pilot by training, I’ve completed four squadron tours, two wing staff tours and numerous detachments and deployments all over the world. I am extremely excited to be here and I am awestruck by the talent, effort, and maturity that I see from our midshipmen every day.

All of this change at the staff level undoubtedly affects the midshipmen. Our intent is to minimize the negative consequences of change and provide an opportunity to improve upon what is already one of the best NROTC Units in the country. Our goal is to not only do things right, but to do the right things. So what do I mean by that? Over the last few months I have asked the midshipmen this question:

“Why do we do it this way?”

Unfortunately, the answer I typically heard was “I don’t know. We’ve always done it that way.” While I don’t believe in changing for the sake of change, I do believe that every component of training must have a legitimate and clear purpose. As such, we are reevaluating all of our policies in order to best prepare the Midshipmen for their careers as Navy and Marine Corps Officers.

Very shortly, these young men and women will be given enormous responsibilities and be asked to be innovative, resourceful, and responsible in the face of an ever changing and adaptable environment. Technology is evolving at an unprecedented pace and crises continue to emerge faster than others are resolved. Our future leaders will be asked to do things yet conceived, and it is necessary for them to perform well under the pressure of this change. Throughout my career I performed jobs that didn’t exist within the Navy’s core mission 20 years ago and that trend will continue for our midshipmen. These future officers must be balanced academically and they also must comprehend the potential impact that their actions and decisions have as representatives of the United States on the global stage. They need to be prepared for the unexpected. They need to lead. And as such, we must make the most of every training
opportunity in order to prepare them for the joining the fleet.

I am happy to announce that there will also be more opportunities for our midshipmen to interact with the fleet. The Navy has reinvigorated a “Sponsor” program where fleet ships and squadrons establish and maintain relationships with the units. We have two squadrons, one F/A-18, one C-40, assigned to us as our sponsor squadrons. In the near future we hope to have a submarine and surface ship assigned to us, as well. As we finalize the details with the squadrons, our midshipmen will have several opportunities to interact with junior officers from these squadrons and learn more about life in the Navy.

Thank you for your support of the NROTC Unit. I am proud to be a part of such an outstanding organization. I want to wish everyone a joyous holiday season and a Happy New Year!

With Warm Regards,
CDR Piper
GWU NROTC Commanding Officer
Continuous Improvement through the three fundamental aspects of the Navy:
Ship, Shipmate, and Self

It is engrained in us from the very beginning of our Naval careers that the order of importance within the navy is Ship, Shipmate and Self. For the sole purposes of this command philosophy however, I wanted to steer away from this hierarchy and move towards viewing these three aspects as a continuum: There is no aspect more important than the other and they are all closely connected to each other. We grow as a battalion when we improve ourselves and take an active role in improving our fellow midshipmen. Like it says on the emblem: One Team, One Fight.

In staying true to this motto, this semester was focused on bringing the battalion closer together as a unit. There was a bigger emphasis on platoon cohesion with the implementation of the Color Platoon Competition and highlighting the accomplishments of outstanding midshipmen with the Midshipman of the Month recognition. Leadership Labs were designed around the themes of Service Before Self, Team Building, and Self-Improvement that reflected the components in the command philosophy. As I said at the very beginning of the semester, I hope you are able to quantifiably say that you improved some aspects of your self during the three months under this command.

Finally, thank you all for making my time as Battalion Commanding Officer more rewarding and enjoyable than I could have ever imagined.

MIDN Heffernan
BCO 1/C
Service Selection
Class of 2016

Explosive Ordnance Disposal
MIDN Griffin Graves

Submarines
MIDN Thomas Brown

Surface Warfare
MIDN Rachel Blankenship
MIDN Mark Chase
MIDN Stefania Cotei
MIDN Mamie Dobbs
MIDN Marcus Killebrew
MIDN John McAleer
MIDN Michael Simon
MIDN Tereza Skruzna
MIDN Brian Weinhardt

Marine Corps
MIDN Stephen Costello
MIDN William Tunney

Nurse Corps
MIDN Anna Charalambous
MIDN Lauren Andres
MIDN Nahlyanne Buela

Information Dominance Warfare
MIDN Jason Taylor

Flight Officer
MIDN Erin Heffernan
MIDN Daniel Soldau
MIDN Leslie Greene

Aviator
MIDN Kyle Webb
MIDN Rachel Marino
What Does Spec War Club Do? The GWU NROTC Spec War Club is tasked with the job of preparing interested and motivated midshipmen for the rigors of the special warfare and special operations communities. Every week, the spec war club takes part in a SEAL Grinder PT workout and a special warfare swim session. However, the most important single event each semester for the spec war club is the special warfare mini-screener. Since the spring of 2014, the spec war club has been organizing an event designed to simulate the difficulties and stressors of the SEAL and EOD screeners at the US Naval Academy, with the added goal of teaching midshipmen the format of evolutions once they go to the selection phases of the SEAL and EOD communities.

Though the mini-screener is shorter than a Naval Academy screener (a screener at the Naval Academy is typically anywhere from 24-30 hours, whereas the spec war club’s fall screener is anywhere from 5-8 hours and the spring mini-screener is anywhere from 11-13 hours), the mini-screener gives a perfect snapshot of the intensity. At the most recent mini-screener, there were 14 participants, 12 male and 2 female, who suffered through 7 difficult hours, in which they had to learn to work as a team to succeed. Midshipman 3rd Class Chris Abislaiman said of the evening: “Over the seven hours of the fall mini-screener, we learned many things: It pays to be a winner, bears don’t have knees, and that the sunrise never seems to come slower yet more beautifully when it finally does. Most importantly though, we learned that anything is possible as long as it’s done as a team.”
Just a little over a month after a rigorous orientation to Naval ROTC at Quantico, I, along with several other fourth class midshipmen, helped to run a field meet for high school JROTC cadets at Herndon High School.

Orientation is all about followership. Not even that — it’s about simply following orders. We learned to unquestioningly and immediately follow all orders from our midshipman instructors. There was very little room for personal initiative, and no room at all for independent thinking. At orientation, if you get it right, you are a worker bee that simply does exactly what it’s supposed to.

That said, it was a little off-putting to find myself in a room where high schoolers — some not more than a few months younger than me— looked to me to set an example and be a mentor. I suddenly found myself hyper-conscious of what I said, how I moved, and how I looked in uniform. These people were looking to me and to my peers for leadership. What should I do? I wasn’t particularly more knowledgeable or experienced than the eldest of the JROTC cadets; but they didn’t know that. It was a humbling experience.

As I sat in the brief room before the meet began, I decided not to let my inexperience keep me from being the best example I possibly could. I sat up straight, checked that my laces were tucked into my boot blousers like I’d learned at orientation, and proceeded to do my job. I realized that followership is critical to leadership — if nothing else, you have to at least be able to do what you’re supposed to when there are eyes on you. Sometimes, setting the example is as simple as doing what you’ve been taught.
My friends and I had left two hours earlier than necessary, but as we continued to take wrong turns and crawl through the traffic on an unusually crowded Boston morning, I knew we were cutting it close. As soon as we arrived at the airport, I ran out of the car, threw on my loaded seabag, and searched for the United Airlines gate in the sticky July heat. I joined the check-in line, but the queue had stopped moving. I knew my flight was about to take off, and I began asking those around me why nothing was moving. Suddenly, the intercom broke our chatter and informed us that the entire United Airlines system was down. We were all trapped. I spent the next ten hours at an airport eating over-priced sandwiches and making very close friends with other stranded midshipmen. We did not arrive at Norfolk until after midnight.

Although I got off to this shaky start, CORTRAMID was without a doubt the best part of my summer. Not only did I gain a deeper understanding of the Navy and Marine Corps, but I learned so much about myself. It was a whirlwind of once-in-a-lifetime experiences, hands-on education, and everlasting friendship.

Our first week was spent in Virginia with the Surface Warfare community. We began by earning Skipper B sailing qualifications at Old Dominion University. Somehow managed to not capsize, a feat I am beyond proud of. Back at Norfolk, we received in depth tours of many ships including the USS Gravely and the USS Harry Truman. We were also given the opportunity to practice driving a ship using realistic simulators. However, my favorite part of the week was the day spent with the brown water navy, in which we learned of their many extensive capabilities and went for a ride on a high-speed sea-ark patrol boat.

Next, we hopped onto a plane going to Georgia in order to learn more about the submarine community. This, surprisingly, was my favorite of the four weeks. On base we experienced “angles and dangles” simulators and learned how to fix a pipe leak, but the real fun came when we went underway aboard the USS Alaska for two days. The experience was beyond incredible. I actually drove the submarine, shot water slugs out of a torpedo tube, experienced real “angles and dangles,” slept between nuclear missiles, ran on a treadmill underwater, worked with the Chefs to make pizzas in the kitchen, and went on the bridge to admire the stars. There was so much to see and so many people to talk to I only slept half of one night, but it was well worth it.

For our third week, we headed in our NWUs and MARPATS for flight suits, as we went back up to Norfolk to learn about the aviation community. There we were given the opportunity to talk to naval aviators and to see their gadgets. The H60 ride was an unforgettable experience, and the simulators we tried during this week were very realistic. Going beyond mere simulations, the highlight of the week for most midshipmen was the T34 helicopter ride with a pilot. When we were up in the air, my pilot performed barrel rolls and allowed me to take control for a bit. The Gs were incredible. In fact, my descent was so deep on the way down that I blacked out. But I was lucky, many of my fellow midshipmen tasted their lunch again.

Our fourth and final week was spent with the Marines. We began the week with a range day, and as a squad leader I had the opportunity to shoot the MK19. During the week, we saw demolition demonstrations, rode in an AAV, and broke the seal of our masks in the gas chamber. We also spent a day at MOUT town, learning how to clear rooms and move through a town. We slept over that night at MOUT town and early the next morning I led a squad composed of three fire teams on a mission through the town. Following this, we spent time with Marine pilots, tried out air simulations and went on an osprey ride, during which the pilot took a selfie with me in the air. On our last day, we let out some aggression with pugil sticks, completed a timed combat fitness test, ran through the entire O course, attempted to run through the entire confidence course, enjoyed a tough PT sessions led by marines, and engaged in a PT competition between two companies. Marine week was probably the busiest and most exciting five days of my life. It was the perfect end to a phenomenal month.

I have to admit, at first I was disappointed that I was ineligible to attend the supposedly superior CORTRAMID West. But I can confidently say now that location honestly does not matter. Unlike anything else, the unparalleled experiences and the deep bonds I formed over that month have changed me as an individual and shaped my future as an officer in the Navy/Marine Corps team.
The dichotomy of experiences from those who have gone in years past to the Mountain Warfare Training Center led to a convoluted set of expectations. After all marine-option midshipmen across the nation congregated in the airport in Reno, Nevada, we were shuttled out to base in the middle of the Toiyabe National Forest, uncertain of our fate once we got off the bus. Without going in to too great of detail, in-processing was an intense wake-up call to what the 10 days held ahead of us.

The first day was absolute chaos. The newly appointed midshipmen platoon staff sprinted in and out of the barracks desperately trying to gain accountability, while the Marine staff instructors were chomping behind them searching for the midshipmen’s sense of urgency. Our outline for the week was presented and the anticipation for the unfolding week was growing.

We began our first excursion from base into the mountains early the next morning and, immediately, there were some who knew they were in for a rough week. A rope-tying lecture and safety briefs occupied the day while we stared ahead at the epic cliff that we would be climbing the next day. The hike down that evening gave view to the beautiful landscape of the mountains as well as the ant sized base camp that seemed an infinity away and the higher mountains that none of us could even fathom climbing.

Humping back up the mountain the following morning with our ropes, gloves, and helmets in hand, we were ready to execute the day’s activities: top roping, repelling, and gorge crossing. There is no words to describe the emotions that struck me when I stepped before the rope stretching across a seemingly bottomless canyon. We all learned something about ourselves after accomplishing the grueling tasks expected of us that day.

The longest evolution of the week began with us strapping on our ILBEs and struggling up a new trail that made the path previously traveled seem like a walk in the park. We hit the first checkpoint after a few hours and learned a great deal about mountain survival, including how to build shelters and craft weapons. If you want to see an immediate boost in morale amongst a group of marine-bound kids, let them loose in a forest, after teaching them how to make weapons out of branches! Thankfully, no major obstacles presented themselves on the first night; however, our luck was about to run out.

The following morning we finished the trek up to the LZ where the remainder of our survival lectures would take place. The LZ reminded me of an arena of massive hills prohibiting view of anything outside of our immediate surroundings, with the exception of a peak in the distance. We were given the remainder of the day to accomplish a land navigation course that spanned over four square kilometers. Nose to the ground and carefully counting each step, trying to apply all the terrain association, my group and I found ourselves on a small peak looking out over the profound mountain range beneath us. I still regret that I did not bring a means – other than my visual memory - to capture this once-in-a-lifetime view.

That night we burrowed into our sleeping bags in two columns, in the middle of the LZ, trying to stay warm. Surprisingly enough, even in the middle of the summer, it gets near freezing temperatures in the middle of the night at the top of the mountain. Those of us lucky enough to avoid fire-watch during the night, were awakened by our staff instructors. With a layer of frost coating our sleeping bags, we struggled to thaw our appendages as we dressed for the day.

As we hiked back down from the mountain, we passed each checkpoint with a further sigh of relief knowing an end to the physical strain was in sight. The week was truly awe-inspiring; having learned so much and made such great friends. MWTC was an incredible training opportunity and I will relish the experiences I had there for time to come.
A Reflection on Officer Candidate School

MIDN 1/C Tunney

For midshipmen striving to commission as 2nd Lieutenants instead of Ensigns, Marine Corps Officer Candidates School (OCS) serves as the climax for the NROTC pipeline. Just an hour south of us in Quantico, Virginia, NROTC Marine Option Midshipmen spend six weeks during the summer between their junior and senior year being “screened and evaluated for the leadership, moral, mental, and physical qualities required for commissioning as a Marine Corps officer.” This screening comes in a number of different forms, many of which the NROTC program is designed to prepare you for: obstacle course runs, night land navigation, leadership reaction courses, and over a dozen academic tests, among a number of other demanding challenges familiar to anyone who has examined this less traveled path.

This summer, both myself and MIDN 1/C Costello successfully completed OCS, where I attended the first session (May 24 – July 3) and MIDN 1/C Costello attended the second session (July 5 – August 15). While every candidate at OCS is evaluated identically according to the same standards, your individual experience will guaranteed to be unique. Among one noticeable difference we discussed was the weather. Quantico is renowned within the Marine Corps for its challenging training environment, and while my session was the wetter of the two (we got over 10 inches of rain during my stay), the second session was hotter, with an average daily high of 87°F (and a number of days that reached past 100°F). Humidity remained somewhat consistently over 80% throughout the summer, which ensured a constant stream of sweat throughout your 6 weeks (and a prime contributing factor to weight and muscle loss, as both of us lost over 10 pounds).

Those statistics, of course, I was able to research after we both graduated – part of the OCS challenge is the high number of unknown entities, which can include the present time, the details of the events for the day, your amount of sleep, and, most notably, your test results and grades, leaving with you a somewhat unsure measurement of your scores and your standing within the platoon, which can leave a constant fog of questioning whether you will have the scores to ultimately complete OCS.

Of special note is Candidate Costello’s performance, where he graduated as the Platoon Commander for Lima Company, 3rd Platoon, a position signifying his exemplary accomplishment among his peers, and qualifying him as an “Honor Grad” of OCS. Both MIDN 1/C Costello and I returned to school this fall to complete our degrees and to teach what we have learned so to prepare all Marine Option midshipmen for OCS and for future careers in the Marine Corps. Following our commission with the rest of the 1/C in May 2016, we will return to Quantico for The Basic School, a 6 month program designed to teach the basics of being a Marine Officer.

Quantico will remain to be wet, hot, and humid during the summer, and thanks to the work of the staff and the training received here at GWUNROTC, Marine Option midshipmen will continue to spend their summers after junior year representing our unit well and proving they have what it takes to earn a commission in the United States Marine Corps.
Please Donate!

MIDN are involved in programs that help offset costs of various unit activates. One such activity that brings in substantial amount of money is assisting with stadium seating at UMD. Sadly, our UMD NROTC brethren are venturing on their own and standing up a new NROTC unit in Fall of 2016. Therefore, we are pursuing other opportunities to earn money to support our MIDN. The associate provost for military and veterans affairs has developed a way for alumni to provide tax deductible donations to the unit! The midshipmen would greatly benefit from any support you might be able to provide. If you would like to donate now, or sometime in the future, please see the options listed below.

Ways to Donate:
1. Make a check out to NROTC FUND and send it to the Unit
2. Give online by visiting http://tinyurl.com/oegqq8u. Select “Other” under “Purpose of Gift” and enter “Naval ROTC Unit “

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