It's been an outstanding semester at the unit. Here are some highlights!

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Tulane Drill Competition
MIDN 2/C Beavers

Each year, the UT NROTC Buccaneer Drill Team travels to New Orleans during the height of the Mardi Gras Celebration to compete in one of the largest drill meets in the nation. This meet is hosted by Tulane’s NROTC Battalion, and it is traditionally held on the Friday before Fat Tuesday—falling on February 13th this year. The drill meet consists of Platoon Inspection, Platoon Armed Basic Drill, Squad Basic Drill, Color Guard, Platoon Exhibition, and Individual Exhibition.

This past semester, I had the privilege and pleasure of planning our trip to Louisiana as the Officer in Charge. We competed against 18 other schools from around the nation, including the Merchant Marine Academy, Norwich University, and Texas A&M University just to name a few. The Buccaneer Platoon consisted of 17 midshipmen and was commanded by MIDN 2/C Whiteman. Also representing the University of Texas NROTC was our 5-man Color Guard commanded by MIDN 3/C Lewis, and the Buccaneer Squad led by MIDN 1/C Saldaña. We sacrificed many mornings and spent countless hours of practice in preparation for this meet. It was an incredible experience for all of the midshipmen and truly brought us together as a team. At the conclusion of the competition, we got to experience New Orleans in all of its glory! Two days of liberty in the French Quarter during the largest Mardi Gras Celebration in the world was quite a reward for all of our hard work.
Leadership Reaction Course (LRC)
MIDN 1/C Whiteman

This semester, the entire NROTC Battalion took a trip to the Leadership Reaction Course (LRC) located at Fort Hood. The LRC consists of various stations and each station has its own “impossible task”. These impossible tasks include obstacles and unique objectives that must be completed in a restricted amount of time. To complete these “impossible tasks” the Midshipmen were separated into fire teams that consisted of four to five Midshipmen. At each station a different Midshipman was put in charge and tasked to complete the LRC station with their fire team. In this manner, every Midshipmen was given a chance to enhance their leadership skills through overcoming adversity, building teamwork, and making critical decisions. Some LRC stations included a pool of water serving the dual purpose of being an obstacle as well as a safety precaution; either way, a lot of Midshipmen ended up falling in, which lightened the mood during this challenging evolution. In the end, the LRC ended up being equally fun and rewarding.
Field Exercise
MIDN 3/C Hernandez

Every spring semester, there is one culminating event that tests all the knowledge and skills that have been taught to the Marine options from the beginning of the semester. The purpose of this physically and mentally demanding event is to prepare the Marine options, especially the 2/C, for Officer Candidate School. Known as the Spring Field Exercises (FEX), it is built to emulate the challenges faced at Officer Candidate School while still being its own unique experience. Although lasting only 3 days and 2 nights, this Spring FEX was packed with an intensity only made possible with months of hard work and preparation by the ME-CEPs, GySgt Rosas, and Maj Balke or AMOI and MOI, respectively.

Given a compass and coordinates, we kicked off the FEX at Camp Mabry with land navigation that forced us to make our way through dense brush and trees to get to the first waypoint. Land navigation was located at both Camp Mabry (Day) and Fort Hood (night). This skill is thoroughly tested at OCS and is a vital tool every Marine must use out in the field to find their way to the Objective Points from their current location. The Night Land Navigation was made difficult by not only the darkness of the unknown terrain at Fort Hood, but was immediately followed by an exhausting 9 mile hump starting in the dead of night.

The rest of the 2nd day was completely dedicated to Small Unit Leadership Exercises (SULEs). In the SULEs, an individual is selected to be a squad leader and is briefed on a mission to execute. The individual is then expected to form an Operations Order and execute the mission by using the skills learned over the semester. For this FEX, the missions were centered on gaining the trust of the local people by defending against or hindering enemy operations that were performed by motivated Navy Midshipmen armed with airsoft guns.

The last day was dedicated to the Leadership Reaction Course (LRC). This was similar to the SULEs, but the main difference came in size and emphasis. The LRC is dedicated to small fire teams faced with a time constraint and obstacles that must be crossed. Although the fire team leader must brief the fire team in an Operations Order fashion, the fire team leader is also being evaluated on his problem solving skills under the pressure of time and the situation.

Somewhere in between all the chaos and intensity I learned that being able to endure a taxing situation comes from the mental toughness and attitude you take when first faced with the situation. To re-emphasize the intensity of FEX, I would like to share the comment made by the AMOI to the MOI when the squad was starting to tread through the cold river for the umpteenth time that inspired this life long lesson.

“Do you hear that, Sir? That’s the sound of their hearts dropping.” – GySgt Rosas.
Leadership Conferences

Notre Dame
MIDN 1/C Masters

Navy Leadership Weekend 2015 was an amazing opportunity to learn from some of the best leaders in the Navy. The selection of Admirals that came to speak was as astounding as it was informative. To highlight some of the most impressive speakers would be impossible as they all gave very differing and equally enlightening information that any midshipman could learn from and reflect upon. The chance to enjoy the hospitality and breathtaking scenery of the snow-covered Notre Dame Campus in South Bend, Indiana was quite a blessing as well. We had the chance to take tours and even got a few history lessons from our Notre Dame Midshipmen counterparts. We all took home with us far more in our hearts and minds than what we came with and each of us will remember and apply this experience for a long time to come.

Naval Academy
MIDN 1/C Culpepper

In late January, MIDN Thayer, MIDN Whiteman, CDR FitzPatrick, and myself traveled up to Annapolis, Maryland for the United States Naval Academy 2015 Leadership Conference. The Conference focused on leading in an interconnected world such as using technology to communicate and lead a team that works all around the world. This is especially useful to us as midshipmen because the U.S. Navy is a global force and we will often have to communicate and work with people in different parts of the world. The Naval Academy is very well connected itself bringing in a wide variety of people to speak and share their experiences. There were CEOs and Vice Presidents of large companies, entrepreneurs, as well as Admirals and Generals both retired and active. The vast amount of knowledge brought to a conference on this scale could not be found anywhere other than the U.S. Naval Academy. The presenters at the conference were excellent but the other students were astounding. Several times we broke up into discussion groups and talked about issues presented by the speakers. The diversity of views and the ability to discuss and debate expanded upon the knowledge gained from the lectures, further fulfilling the experience. The Conference was busy and quickly paced; however, there was some downtime to meet and mingle with the other attendees. Specifically, we all made friends with a salty, old Chief in our hotel who gave us a broader view on the U.S. Navy, and I personally made friends with several civilian attendees who became great friends. The United States Naval Academy 2015 Leadership Conference was not only a great opportunity to gain knowledge and wisdom, but also an enjoyable time to make friends and discuss ideas particularly important for soon-to-be Naval leaders.

Student Conference on National Affairs
MIDN 1/C Baker

The Student Conference on National Affairs (SCONA) 2015 was a great learning experience. The conference was called "Ignite the Human Potential." Those attending were split into groups of around ten people and given a topic. Mine was "Looking through the PRISM" where we discussed the current issues with the NSA in the post-Snowden era. Throughout the conference we had four guest speakers, General Dempsey (Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff), General Hayden (Former Director of the NSA and the CIA), William Davis (Director of the UNDP Representation office in Washington), and Dr. Dinah Hannaford (Cultural Anthropologist, Texas A&M). Each group was facilitated by an officer from the U.S. Army War College to discuss their topic. The task was to come up with peaceful, diplomatic solutions, or at least feasible and easily employed solutions, for our topic. Aside from a three page written solution, the groups had to come up with a skit that displayed their topic and solution as well. Overall it was a fantastic experience to combine diverse ideas from people with various backgrounds to come up with a policy that could make a true impact to United States foreign and domestic policy.
Leadership Conferences cont.

Hatton W. Sumners
MIDN 2/C Davis

The Hatton W. Sumners Conference is a conference that coaches undergraduate students on how to become effective, ethical leaders for tomorrow. They try to focus on bringing students from around the globe to present different perspectives on ways to lead and how different cultures tackle various ethical issues. The entire weekend was set up around a strength finder test taken before arriving at the conference. Once you found your five most dominant leadership traits you applied them in the activities and leadership classes throughout the weekend.

The first day was the most interesting because as you uncovered the timeline for the weekend’s events you had the opportunity to meet people from the other countries represented. We first went to the Red McCombs End Zone at the UT stadium to split up into groups for the discussions planned over the next two days. Using ice breakers to familiarize with each other I met people from other Texas Universities as well as two students from Mexico.

Later in the day, as well as the following days, there were leadership classes such as how to be an effective leader using anecdotes to emphasize your point as well as identifying conflict resolution strategies. These classes were with students in other groups so once we were complete we would discuss with our group. This was vital to grasping these difficult topics and revealed multiple perspectives that I alone wouldn’t have thought of.

The conference had very influential speakers speak to us about how to be effective leaders and how they apply their leadership concepts in their job. One speaker was Betsy Myers who works with women’s rights and was a part of the Clinton administration in the 90s as well as the CEO of President Obama’s 2008 Campaign. Scott Beale was a U.S. diplomat for human trafficking and started one of the largest non-profit programs in the world called “Atlas Corps” also spoke. Shaifali Puri was the Executive Director of Global Innovation at NIKE Foundation, described how she helped drive innovation across all aspects of the Foundation’s work. Formerly the Executive Director of Scientists without Borders, Shaifali raised millions of dollars to support open-source innovation in the sciences with partners like Johnson & Johnson and PepsiCo. Also in attendance was Chancellor McCraven, who shared some words of wisdom with me during some of the breaktime. Altogether, these great speakers made this event very worthwhile and demonstrated how I can apply some of these leadership techniques at my own level.
On 8 May 2015 the UT NROTC Midshipmen, MECEPs, and Unit Staff celebrated the inaugural Dining Out as a battalion. This annual event is meant to celebrate the end of the academic year with all of the battalion members and their dates as well as to wish a last farewell to the graduating seniors. Dining Out consisted of a two hour boat ride on The Commodore around Lake Austin filled with music, dancing, and great food and drinks. The Commodore is a double decked tour boat that was perfectly sized to host all of the members of the battalion plus more! Fortunately, the weather cooperated and it was a beautiful evening to ride around Lake Austin and to dine outside enjoying the night sky and scenery. A lot of hard work and planning went into making this first-ever Dining Out possible and based on the success of the evening we hope to make it an annual event. Most would agree that this should be a new tradition at UT NROTC.
Awards Ceremony
MIDN 2/C Bishop

At the end of each school year, the University of Texas at Austin Naval ROTC unit has a Spring Awards Ceremony to recognize its stellar midshipmen. The selection process for an award is very competitive and candidates must meet or exceed the requirements in the following areas: academics, leadership aptitude, and physical fitness.

The Battalion is very fortunate to have an expansive and supportive Alumni network as well as many outside agencies that partner with us to recognize outstanding midshipmen. This year, 23 different agencies gave 33 different awards to deserving midshipmen.

In addition to awards for excellence, MIDN 1/C Beck was selected to receive a Naval Officer sword. The presentation of multiple awards and an Officer’s sword presented by our generous donors made this Spring Award Ceremony an incredible and memorable event.

Change of Command

Every semester, the battalion staff changes over and another group of midshipmen are given the opportunity to serve in a billet and experience the challenge of leadership that comes with authority.

Congratulations to the Fall 2015 BN Staff:

CO - MIDN 1/C Hannum
XO - MIDN 1/C Thayer
SgtMaj - MIDN 1/C Olivarez
OPS - MIDN 2/C Bishop
AOPS - MIDN 2/C Beavers
ADJ - MIDN 1/C Masters
SUPPO - MIDN 1/C Baker
PTI - MIDN 3/C Rost
1st PC - MIDN 1/C Dingas
2nd PC - MIDN 1/C Cochran
LN PC - MIDN 1/C Slavin
Commissioning!

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE SPRING 2015 GRADUATES!

(From left to right: ENS Grace Jimeno, ENS Mark Jbeily)