

ROTC drives success with training

As spring competitions approach, ROTC cadets intensify training on and off campus

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Beyoncé's "Single Ladies" blasts over the speakers in Warner Palaestra as SJU senior Connor Gjevre yells, "This is for you, boys!"

It's minutes before 6 a.m. on a Wednesday, and ROTC cadets are preparing for a routine morning of physical training (PT). Cadets are dressed in gray T-shirts tucked into black running shorts, a yellow reflective PT belt wrapped around their waists. As everyone arrives, they are briefed on the plans for the day and are set to work.

As spring competitions approach, training intensifies for the Fighting Saints Battalion as they strive to live up to their past successes. From on-campus workouts and military tactics classes to weekend trips at Camp Ripley, Fighting Saints cadets have begun to fine-tune their skills for a chance to prove that they are one of the best ROTC programs in the nation.

A typical morning of PT consists of sit-ups, push-ups and running. Although these workouts are most common, cadets often delineate from the normal regiment. The less intense days involve long periods of push-ups

and sit-ups but when a more difficult training routine is scheduled, they are assigned something special.

"Sometimes it's towel PT. They'll take a towel and put it back onto the floor and push it back and forth across the gym. It'll go on for about 30 minutes and it's brutal," Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Darryl Bascom said.

In addition to preparation for competition, training also serves to ready the cadets for the PT test, which all cadets on track for the Army or National Guard must take. This test entails push-ups, sit-ups and running, and affects what kind of job they will receive post-graduation. In order to pass the PT test cadets must earn a 180 of 300. Advanced cadets, however, receive scores on an extended scale reaching 380.

After PT, cadets are allotted an hour to shower and eat before reporting to their respective military science classes where they are taught about formations, tactics and procedures that they will need to know when they are evaluated at a Leadership and Development Course (LJDAC) later on.

These tactics and procedures are then put to use when cadets train at Camp Ripley, a National Guard military base in Little Falls, Minn. At Camp Ripley, they participate in land navigation exercises, as well as platoon drills.

Cadets gather around the sand table—a map drawn on the



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ROTC cadets gather at Camp Ripley before setting out on land navigation, during which they are required to locate a number of points in a five-hour period.

ground—for a land navigation briefing. Land navigation involves searching for "hoods" or "flags" that cadets locate on a map. Prior to a five-hour period of searching, each cadet is allowed 15 minutes to calculate each "hood" location.

"You have numbers, you use a protractor and calculate the exact point on the map that each of your flags are at," said junior Mark Francour. "You'll have eight

of them and from there you'll pick which route you think will work the best to get them."

Occasionally weather plays a role in the level of difficulty these tasks present. During their last visit, these exercises occurred after a fresh snowfall, something that makes what they call dead-reck-

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oning—ignoring trails and traveling directly to each point through woods and difficult terrain—a bit more difficult.

“A lot of people take trails until they get close to where their point is,” said junior Dan Beirne. “It might not be the most direct route but it might be quicker, especially when there’s fresh snow on the ground.”

Cadets must return before the five-hour time limit is up. The expectation is that they are able to find all eight of their “hoods” or at the very least, a minimum of five flags.

If cadets are unable to locate the minimum of five, it results in a check in with a commanding officer, such as Bascom, to discuss why this happened.

“We’re a team, we’re a family,” Bascom said. “But you have to give us everything you’ve got because I will accept nothing less.”

“If you don’t think that at some point in your career, a soldier is going to turn

to you and say ‘now what?’ then you’re wrong.”

Every cadet has a commanding officer that they meet with to track the progression of their training. It is these meetings that push cadets to perfect their craft.

“Excellence breeds excellence, so the programs that are not doing well tend to stay down that way,” Bascom said. “What’s happening right now is these guys are all pushing each other. If you look at them, they are so ferociously competitive. They’re not only competing with other teams, they’re competing with each other.”

Overall, this competition leads cadets to go above and beyond—they do whatever they feel is necessary to ensure perfection.

“We’re kind of a big deal,” said senior Annie Smith. “We don’t really realize how good we are either until we go and compete with other schools.”