



THUNDER ROLLS

2016-2017 NEWSLETTER

ROLLING THUNDER BATTALION, Wheaton College • Olivet Nazarene University • Lewis University

Website: wheaton.edu/Academics/Departments/ROTC E-mail: military.science@wheaton.edu

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2-44 ADA Battalion hosted Rolling Thunder Seniors at Fort Campbell during the CAPSTONE II trip in February.

GREETINGS FROM THE PROFESSOR OF MILITARY SCIENCE

Lieutenant Colonel Steve Kurczak

Alumni and Program Friends –

My family and I wish to use this opportunity, within this introductory article to our annual Wheaton ROTC newsletter, to thank the entire Wheaton ROTC Program Alumni. I was and still am extremely humbled and in awe of the outreach and selfless correspondence from you out in the force and those since retired. A lot of alumni wrote me via email even before I completed my PCS from FT Leavenworth, KS this past summer. Your outpouring of support and emails offering encouragement for my then future, now current position, as the PMS of Wheaton's illustrious ROTC program; was inspiring. As an ROTC product 20 plus years ago through James Madison University in Virginia, I remain impressed with how connected and tuned in you all have stayed to your roots and starts at Wheaton College and its affiliate schools under the ROTC program. You all became the immediate "military" community that is lacking here near Chicago due to location away from a military installation. It helped me feel at home instantly before even arriv-

ing to these western Chicago suburbs. I arrived on a "shotgun" nomination to this job only two weeks before classes started and have been catching up to where I needed to be ever since.

I am a Field Artillery officer by trade and have deployed once on a peace keeping mission to Kosovo, once in support of OIF and once in support of OEF as a deterrent force on mission in UAE. My family of four daughters grew by two, a week before we arrived in Wheaton. We added a sibling set of foster kids that we are in the process of adopting. Once I got into position here my awe and inspiration only grew as I became more familiar with how small the college truly is. Your connection, interest, and heart continue to build and add to this program's legacy and have made this program bigger in comparison to the larger private and public institutions with ROTC programs. For that I want you to be proud. This "David" like institution amongst a lot of "Goliaths" succeeds in nearly all metrics.

Much like our POTUS does annually with the state of the union address, I want to take the rest of this correspondence to impart the state of your ROTC program and legacy. Our "small-college" program continues to perform well compared to others nationwide. This year, like every year, we expect to surpass our mission set of commissioned officers. We should see twenty-eight 2LTs enter the force this year from Wheaton College, Lewis University, ONU, Aurora University, and North Central College. Twenty of that group will enter the Active Duty component. The others competed for and desired Reserve or National Guard service. Ten of our MSIVs were in the top 20% of cadets in the nation after their stellar performances at Advanced Camp last summer. Five of these ten senior cadets were in the Top 10% and designated Distinguished Military Honor Graduates. Nearly every senior was assessed into their top three branch choices. They are all truly excited and ready to enter the force as competent and capable officers and will

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make you all truly proud. We expect to do as well or better in the years ahead.

The new CG at USACC revived Recondo and emphasizes Advanced Camp. We will see land nav, weapons qualification, APFT, and STX lane leader evaluations count as some key determining factors in the cadet's OML scores. Our future is bright as well as we have roughly fourteen known national ROTC scholarship recipients awarded in high school that are interested in Wheaton or one of our affiliate schools. Seven of these fourteen are committed, to join the RTB at Wheaton.

Like every year for the past 15 years (as researched by our program historian), this year saw the Ranger Challenge teams both take first place at the Task Force level. We competed with more than seven programs in a local competition; UIC, EIU, WIU, Loyola, etc. They then represented you well at the Brigade (regional level). St John's University and Marquette University will remain our stiffest competition next year

and we have them on our "target list worksheet." Our Ranger Challenge teams have trained hard and plan to take top honors at this year's Kansas University Ranger Buddy competition in April. Our cadets also participated at this year's ROTC basketball competition that occurred in March at the University of Notre Dame.

In closing, thanks for all you do to recruit for Wheaton. Wheaton ROTC alum are the largest recruiting resource I know that maintains the quality and caliber of cadets now and in our future. The mentorship between alum and current cadets is received well and only enhances our future leaders. Be proud in what our current cadet battalion is doing and be proud in your success in ensuring future cadet battalions remain just as strong and capable; this success speaks to you and the legacy you have left in this program. Keep up the good work, I look forward to interacting with you all in person if you visit or through email.



RANGER CHALLENGE – TASK FORCE & BRIGADE

by Cadet Abby Burgdorf, Wheaton '17

I inherited the Ranger Challenge program from 2LT Matthew Cox last spring. We trained to compete at Kansas State University's annual Buddy Ranger Challenge competition in April. At KU, the RTB won top program while our female team placed 1st, our male team placed 2nd, and our co-ed team placed 5th.

Following that successful season, I had high hopes for our RC teams in the fall. Our 9-man A team and 5-female team won Task Force and advanced to Brigade. The Brigade competition lasted three days. At Fort McCoy, WI, we started off with a marksmanship challenge and timed weapons disassemble/assemble. The next morning, we completed a grueling 7-mile ruck followed by five lanes. In between each lane, teams located land nav points, which was a true challenge. Teams had to reach their next lane in a specified amount of time or were disqualified. The events consisted of a medical challenge, hand grenade assault course, a tactical scenario, mystery event,

and one rope bridge. After completing the events, we embarked on night land nav training. To top it all off, we completed the APFT and obstacle course in the morning.

Be proud; our 5-female team placed 2nd overall at Brigade. After two very successful seasons that taught me many valuable lessons on leadership, I passed the program to Will McKinnon- the captain of last year's 9-man A team.

As many cadets will attest, RC is some of the best training you can receive as a cadet. Our program is able to combine the professionalism of our Army with a camaraderie that spans all MS levels. On the RTB RC team, participants get a rare glimpse at how highly motivated and exceedingly high speed cadets must rely on each other. RC focuses not just on physical prowess, but also excellence intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Ranger Challenge cadets are not only more in touch with their strengths and weaknesses but they can also better define



terms like self-sacrifice, respect and loyalty. This holistic development creates better cadets and ultimately better officers. This is truly what makes the RTB Ranger Challenge team so unique.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND LANGUAGE PROGRAM (CULP) – RAWANDA

by Cadet Justus Hanson, Wheaton '19

Summer 2016 during the month of June, I was assigned as a member of a CULP mission to Rwanda. Our main assignment while we were in country was to train alongside the Rwanda Defense Force cadets at the Gako Military Academy. A typical day training with the Rwandan cadets could look like anything from creating and presenting terrain models to learning how to march like a Rwandan. We even had a chance to watch one of the Rwandan battalions that was preparing to deploy to northern Africa to engage in combat operations. My favorite parts of working with the cadets were the friendships that I was able to make with the Rwandans. We were given a Rwandan battle-buddy and placed into a platoon that we remained with the whole time, and as a result I was able to really get to know the cadets that I worked with everyday and gain insights into their everyday lives.

In addition to our time training at the military academy, we were also able to paint classrooms at the Nyamata Bright School. The students that attended the

school aged in range from kindergarten to 6th grade. They loved having us there and would come watch us paint, teach us words in Kinyarwanda, or even play soccer with us.

Rwanda suffered a horrible genocide in 1994, and the effects of this are still visible today. We visited the national genocide museum as well as sites such as the Nyamata church, where 40,000 Rwandans were buried in a mass grave. We also toured a reconciliation village where survivors live alongside those who murdered their family members. This was an incredibly sobering and eye opening experience of the struggles the country has faced in recent history.

In Kigali, we attended events at the U.S. Embassy. We celebrated Fourth of July at a party for all Americans living in the country. Our team met the Ambassador and the new Defense Attaché who is a graduate of the Rolling Thunder Battalion! It was such an amazing experience to run into a Wheaton alum half-way around the world.

This program taught me very important

lessons that relate to my future as an Army officer. I learned to interact with soldiers from other countries, how to use my understanding of history to understand others' culture more, and even how the embassy works and what its role is. CULP is one of the best summer training experiences ROTC offers.



MEMOIRS OF A FORMER CADET BATTALION COMMANDER

by Cadet Ryan Kelsey, North Central '17

“Own your role,” is the refrain I gave the Rolling Thunder Battalion in Fall 2016. By this, I wanted to push individuals to take ownership of their units, either at the team leader, company commander, or staff position level. In doing so, it was my belief that we would be able to plan, disseminate, and execute the best training possible. While we met several challenges along the way, I am incredibly proud of how we were able to overcome adversity and accomplish each task we faced.

Fall semester brought many changes in cadre leadership. This included a new Commanding General of Cadet Command, a new Professor of Military Science, as well as several other cadre members. Through all of the changes we encountered, I am pleased with how our cadets were able to work in an ambiguous environment, create a shared understanding, and accomplish the mission successfully. I cannot thank cadre enough for their hard work and guidance throughout the semester.

Some of our biggest successes in the Fall semester came from some of our greatest challenges. Because of the changes in Cadet Command, our MSIII Cadets saw an increased role in the planning and execution process of Leadership Lab planning. As a result, they are well-versed in the expectations of them as they go to Advanced Camp in the summer and take the initial steps of leading the Battalion as MSIVs. Furthermore, the 9-man male Ranger Challenge team saw the graduation of some of its core members in the Spring of 2016. The program excelled though and were able to recruit highly motivated and committed underclassmen to fill roles, which allowed them to dominate the Task Force competition and compete at the Brigade level. I am incredibly proud of our Battalion's efforts and achievements in the Fall semester and look forward to graduating, seeing our seniors depart for the Army, and having our underclassmen take this program into the future.

STUDY ABROAD – THAILAND

by Cadets Sarah Runey and Austin Patrick, Wheaton '17

We studied in Thailand during the fall semester through the International Sustainable Development Studies Institute. The program enables students to explore the interrelated themes of Thailand's culture and ecology through intensive field courses structured around experiential learning.

The experiential learning element was perhaps the most unique and valuable aspect of the semester-- in preparation for the field courses, we spent hours each day for over a month practicing the Thai language and studying the governmental, economic, religious, and historical backgrounds of the nation. Once this foundation had been laid, we transitioned to alternating rotations of three weeks in the field and one week of recovery and classroom time in Chiang Mai, our home base. The first field course focused on sustainable agriculture in the Golden Triangle, the second on the politics of forest ecology and land rights among ethnic minority communities in Northern Thailand, and the third on coastal resources

and the tourism industry in the Andaman Sea. In each course, we learned on our own initiative by planning and conducting meetings with village leaders, community members, government agencies, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), practicing our Thai language abilities as much as possible and using interpreters to supplement and clarify as necessary. The depth of our learning was largely a result of how well we asked meaningful questions, observed our surroundings, and remained creatively engaged with the process. We also lived with Thai host families for the majority of the semester, which provided yet another avenue to both develop relationships with Thais and better understand the complexities of their lives.

One of the most tangible takeaways that Thailand imparted on us was a greater appreciation for the vast array of differences that exists amongst different cultures. We were privileged to experience first hand what makes Thai people uniquely special,



but at the same time the more we immersed in this foreign culture the realization became apparent that we all share many common values that can simply be expressed as our universal human experience.

WESTERN HEMISPHERE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY COOPERATION (WHINSEC)

by Cadet Sarah Ganster, Olivet Nazarene '17



Cadet Ganster and Colombian cadet preparing to step off.

I had the privilege of participating in joint training with cadets from countries in South America. As such, I was selected to attend a five-week cadet leadership training course at Fort Benning, Georgia. The training took place under the auspices of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation—WHINSEC.

When I arrived, I was one of five U.S. Army ROTC cadets. We joined 125 Colombian cadets, and 50 Peruvian cadets. Throughout that time I was integrated into both the Colombian and Peruvian army's culture.

The cadets from Colombia and Peru traveled to Fort Benning to participate in CLD (Cadet leadership Development). The course is designed to promote leadership opportunities and to teach the Colombian and Peruvian cadets about U.S. Army tactics. The course was taught entirely in Spanish.

During my time at WHINSEC I participated in several events including land navigation, a confidence course, qualified on a pop up range, and learned urban tactics such as room clearing. We also took democracy courses, wrote Operation Orders, and had a three days training in the field. The training I completed was eye opening and very beneficial to learning how to work with foreign militaries. This course also allowed me to develop a wider view of the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility and adapt to foreign cultures.





ALL AMERICAN BOWL

by Cadet Mitch Reid, North Central '17

During winter break I was given the opportunity to be a cadet marshal at the U.S. Army All-American bowl in San Antonio, TX. This is the most prestigious bowl game to play in as a high school football player and only the best recruits from the years senior class are invited to play at the bowl. Many current NFL players are alumni of the U.S. Army All-American Bowl including Cam Newton, Odell Beckham Jr., Andrew Luck, and Adrian Peterson.

It was a very exciting opportunity to be a part of the bowl game as well as the national combine. Our main responsibility of the trip to San Antonio as cadet marshals

was to help organize and run the combine which occurs a few days before the actual bowl game. We were tasked with grading all of the different events that are a part of a football combine including the 40-yard dash, shuttle drill, 3-cone drill, vertical jump, and one-on-one drills.

Not only was it fun to interact with all of the athletes and share their excitement for the sport, it was also great to work with cadets and active Soldiers from all over the country and share experiences from our universities and military service.

When we weren't working for the combine we had the opportunity to see what the city of San Antonio had to offer such as the River walk downtown and the historic site of the Alamo. Hopefully the Rolling Thunder Battalion continues to send our cadets on this trip so they can enjoy the atmosphere and live the experience like I did.

WEST POINT—CADET FIELD TRAINING

by Cadet Lauren Matson, Olivet Nazarene '18



Cadet Matson (far right) poses for a picture with West Point cadets.

This summer I was given the opportunity to participate in Cadet Field Training (CFT) at West Point. This was a great learning experience for me as it not only helped develop my knowledge, but I measurably grew as a leader. The training lasted thirty days, and during that time we spent eleven days in the field. During this period, the 10th Mountain Division and U.S. Army Special Forces acted not only as OPFOR but also as our instructors. CFT allowed me, my fellow ROTC cadets, and cadets from West Point to be put through similarly rigorous field training as that we will receive at Advanced Camp. We covered everything from land navigation, to establishing patrol bases, to practicing our marksmanship skills. I found that while I was prepared for this training, it also proved to be physically and mentally challenging.

Aside from the work, we were able to have some fun! I had the privilege to experience what it is like to not only be an officer, but to also to experience the enlisted side of different Army branches. We got to visit different Army branches including aviation, field artillery (FA), armor, engineering, and infantry. While visiting the Field Artillery branch, we were given the opportunity to fire 155 mm howitzers with the artillery Soldiers. In the aviation branch, we were able to fly in Blackhawk helicopters. In the engineer branch we blasted through walls with C-4 gas and in the armor branch we drove around in state-of-the-art tank simulators. These are just a few examples of the amazing opportunities this training had to offer.

In the end, I thought this training proved to be extremely beneficial to my military career as it taught me to be technically and tactically proficient. It exposed me to a large group of different viewpoints and ideas and helped me learn to work with a wide variety of people. I would encourage other cadets to participate in this great opportunity as it has the potential to benefit cadets in all areas and to gain insights into the life of West Point cadets.

CADET TROOP LEADING TRAINING (CTLT) – FORT SILL, OKLAHOMA

by Cadet Sabrena Miller, Lewis '17

This past summer, I attended CTLT at Fort Sill, OK with the 428th Field Artillery (FA) battery. For three weeks, I spent my time getting an inside look into the world of Field Artillery. During my training, I was assigned to three different leadership roles including platoon leader (PL), fire support officer (FSO) and fire direction officer (FDO). The battery's principle purpose is to provide fires and logistics to the Army Field

Artillery School (FABOLC) and Marine Detachment training at Fort Sill. Some of the highlights of my training included the opportunity to fire the M119A3 105mm Towed Cannon Howitzers, provide ammo to the M109A6 Paladin, supervise the firing of over 1,500 artillery rounds and participate in five total live fire events. Additionally, I received training as a 13B cannon crew member, integrated into FDC operations, and participated in battery training meetings.

leaders. In addition to that, I also gained insight on how we must be physically fit, confident in our abilities, precise in our profession, and adaptive in the execution of the mission.



The diverse experience helped shape my understanding of different branches in the Army and provided me with a greater insight into managing my career in the military. The CTLT program gave me a true taste of life in the Army and allowed me to immerse myself in areas I would have never had the chance to explore. I was able to see the unique challenges and responsibilities faced by combat

As a future female FA officer, I am glad to have had the opportunity to be a part of such a dynamic and challenging branch within traditional combat arms. Field Artillery continues to open new positions to females, and it is an exciting time to be a part of an expanding branch.

NURSE SUMMER TRAINING PROGRAM IN GERMANY

by Cadet Mary Kate Cowen, Olivet Nazarene '18



CPT Black and Cadet Cowen in Germany

This summer after attending Cadet Leadership Course, I visited Germany to participate in the Nurse Summer Training Program (NSTP). The NSTP allows ROTC nursing cadets to shadow an Army nurse for at least twelve shifts at an Army or military hospital. Nursing students gain experience

on a variety of floors including: Emergency Room, Intensive Care Unit, mother-baby, and medical surgical. I spent most of my time in the ICU. Growing up I saw a lot due to my little brother's medical condition. This drove and inspired me to become a nurse, and eventually pushed me to try and participate in this program.

While in nursing school, we spend a lot of time in clinical settings, however, we do not obtain the one-on-one attention that I received from my preceptor this summer. While there, I was able to practice the skills I had already learned, and I was also given the opportunity to learn new skills. One of my favorite experiences this summer was spending a good amount of time in the operating room. I learned first-hand the different roles of the people involved in surgery. This included the surgeon, the scrub-tech, the OR nurse, and the nurse-anesthetist. Every time I was

in the OR, the staff was very excited about teaching me new things. An example is that the nurse-anesthetist showed me all the machines that go into monitoring a patient's vital signs, as well anesthesia.

Along with the great experiences that I had in the hospital, I was given time to travel around Europe and broaden my cultural horizons. I'm grateful for all the places I went, and I really loved visiting Paris. I spent the day shopping and going to a multitude of museums. I eventually wrapped up the day doing what probably every tourist does, and hopped on a boat to watch the Eiffel tower light up from the water.

Overall, I am so thankful for the outstanding experience I had last summer. The lessons I learned and the people I met had an impact on me I will value for the rest of my career. "





AIRBORNE SCHOOL

by Cadet Melissa Churchill, Lewis '17

This past summer, I attended the three-week course known as Basic Airborne School (BAC) in Ft Benning, GA. As the name implies, Soldiers learn the techniques involved in parachuting from airplanes and landing safely. The final test includes five non-assisted jumps. The purpose of the BAC is to qualify in the use of parachutes as a means of combat deployment and to develop leadership, self-confidence, and an aggressive spirit through mental and physical conditioning.

Army ROTC has taught me using immersive and challenging leadership development as well as how to both lead and follow in different situations. The experience I have gained in ROTC strengthens critical thinking skills in an ethically challenging environment. I have been taught to analyze situations and make sound decisions under pressure and as a result I have become a more adaptive and efficient leader.

CADET SUMMER TRAINING—BASIC CAMP

by Cadet Megan Conlin , Lewis '19

After 31 days of emotionally and physically exhausting training in the Kentucky heat, roughly 400 fellow battle buddies and I could proudly proclaim that we made it through Basic Camp. Basic Camp, formerly known as CIET (Cadet Initial Entry Training), is an outstanding leadership program. It introduces Army life and leadership training to college students to motivate and further develop them as future leaders in the United States Army.

At camp, early mornings welcomed us like a cold bucket of ice water running down our backs, and late nights came with heavy eyes and dutiful weapons cleaning. However, with these long hours of the day, the training and leadership activities were extremely successful at Basic Camp. Some of the topics that were covered included CBRN (Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense), first aid/medical briefings, confidence courses/team building courses, land navigation, and running lanes. These training courses were challenging while at the same time eye-opening. Its not every day that you are put in a difficult situation with numerous resources and a motivated team ready to solve the problem. At Basic Camp, I had the opportunity to develop my personal leadership roles as well as become a better follower. Working with cadets from across the nation, each coming from different backgrounds and observing different leadership styles, was an outstanding opportunity.

This time away from home immersed in Army life gave me the ability to react to adversity and learn different ways of approaching problems. Basic camp was an amazing experience and taught me so much about myself, others, and increased my knowledge of the Army.

CLASS OF 2017 BRANCHES

ACTIVE DUTY

Abby Burgdorf, Wheaton, MI
 Melissa Churchill, Lewis, MI
 Sarah Ganster, Olivet, FA
 Luke Harris, Wheaton, AD
 Timothy Henry, Wheaton, EN
 Ryan Kelsey, North Central, FA
 Julio Lara, Lewis, FA
 Sarah Neubaum, Wheaton, MI
 Michael Niehaus, Wheaton, TC
 William Otto, Wheaton, AR
 Austin Patrick, Wheaton, IN
 Spencer Peterson, Wheaton, TC
 Mitch Reid, North Central, FA
 Sarah Runey, Wheaton, MS
 Luke Smith, Lewis, TC
 Ashley Sullivan, Olivet, AN
 Adam Timmer, Olivet, CM
 Alexis Torres, Olivet, CM
 Stephen Yonke, Wheaton, CY (Cyber)

NATIONAL GUARD

Woodson Miles, Wheaton, MI
 Emily Mehlbrech, Lewis, TBD

RESERVES

Bryan Pruden, Wheaton, SC

EDUCATIONAL DELAY

Dereck Woodcock, Wheaton, Chaplain Corps





RTB EVENTS

May 6	Commissioning—Olivet Nazarene University
May 7	Commissioning—Wheaton College
May 21	Commissioning—Lewis University
Sep 23-24	Fall FTX
Nov 16	Fall Cadet Leadership Exercise Trip (U-505, Chicago, IL)
October 13-15	Task Force Ranger Challenge
Nov 3-5	Brigade Ranger Challenge
Nov 30	Dining-In

ALUMNI NEWS & EVENTS

OLIVET NAZARENE

27–29 October 2017 (Homecoming)

WHEATON COLLEGE

29 & 30 September 2017 (Homecoming)



INTERESTED IN SUPPORTING THE ROLLING THUNDER BATTALION?

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 501 College Avenue
 Wheaton, IL, 60187-5593

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- Scroll to the bottom and select the orange rectangle that says "Make a Gift Today."
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- In the window that pops up, scroll to the bottom and check the option, "Other (Please specify designation in gift comment)."
- In the "Gift comment" field under the Designation Options heading, type in "Department of Military Science."
- Enter in your contact information and follow directions to complete the donation.

OPTION 3

You can call the Wheaton College Advancement Department at 1.800.525.9906 during normal business hours central time and make a credit card donation. Please make sure you indicate that it is for the Department of Military Science.



Wheaton College
For Christ and His Kingdom

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