After finishing their plebe (freshman) year, West Point cadets are sent to Camp Buckner for a month for training. West Point allows ROTC Cadets and foreign exchange cadets to come train with them. I was one of the ROTC cadets who attended Cadet Field Training and found it to be a very rewarding learning experience.

We covered many of the same topics that we do in ROTC but got to apply them in much more of a field setting. We did three different land navigation courses: night, short range, and long range. The long range took place at Harriman State Park, a wildlife preserve where there was typically at least a kilometer between each of the points. Cadets did an introduction to patrolling course where we spent three days in the field, setting up patrol bases and relocating them tactically and running missions such as ambushes and recons from our bases. We practiced marksmanship with the M4. Cadets were required to zero their weapons before we began urban operations training, the culminating event of which was a live fire, room clearing exercise.

The first day of Camp Buckner we were told that the camp was meant to break us down to build up our confidence. There were two confidence courses we had to complete, one on land with a 40 foot confidence climb, the other over the lake with an 80 foot “slide for life.” The better confidence building event, I thought, was the FTX. The FTX lasted a full 72 hours. Before we left, we were provided three MREs for the entire trip and I think we managed three hours of sleep the entire time. We learned how to best conceal ourselves in the field. If we were not actively running a mission, we were either rucking to the next one or pulling security to conduct deliberate ambushes, and how to recon an objective. The culminating event was a platoon raid on a village inhabited by hostiles.

We boarded a Chinook helicopter at our patrol base and then were taken to the outskirts of the village. From there we launched a raid, pulling security to capture a high value target. My squad entered the village, taking and returning fire with blank rounds while clearing each of the buildings. After the mission, we picked up our gear and rucked the three miles back to Camp Buckner.

CFT pushed me and the other Cadets to our physical limits. They deprived us of food and sleep to see how we react under stress. The month was challenging, both physically and mentally, but was extremely rewarding at the end. Each team and each squad learned to work together and push each other to accomplish the assigned missions.
The Month In Pictures

Cadet Jessica Persoon and Jennifer Bullis are all smiles following their graduation from the U.S. Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, GA. (Above): Cadet Andrew Wycheck gets a well deserved pat on the back from SFC Joseph Wilkerson following his graduation from LDAC. Cadet Wycheck was the only Royal Warrior to earn the RECONDO Badge at LDAC this summer.

Cadets Evan Dimakas and Sidney Jaques flash big smiles and congratulate each other following the LDAC graduation ceremony for the 13th & 14th ROTC Regiments on 05 August.

2LT Tae Rim from the University of Scranton following his commissioning ceremony at LDAC. Upon graduation from LDAC, 2LT Rim was commissioned. He will be serving as an Ordnance Officer in the US Army Reserves.
Our Time at Airborne: Questions and Answers

By Cadets Jessica Persoon & Jennifer Bullis

Why did you choose to go to Airborne School?

CDT Persoon: Technically, I did not choose to go to Airborne because I had to meet certain requirements in order to receive a slot. For example I had to have a good GPA and PT scores, and pass a four mile run. Airborne, however, was a school I really wanted to do because I really wanted to challenge myself and do something that not many of my peers get to do.

CDT Bullis: First, I wanted to challenge myself and see if I could do it. Another reason I wanted to go to Airborne School is because it has become a sort of family tradition. Both of my parents went to Airborne when they were in college and my sister went last summer. I also wanted to my dad to stop calling me ‘Leg’.

What was the hardest/easiest part of Airborne?

CDT Persoon: The hardest part of Airborne was definitely the SLT (Swing Land Trainer). This is when you are strapped into a harness with risers and you then step off a 12 foot platform to practice your PLFs (Parachute Landing Fall). This training was not so much hard but rather more painful and frustrating because I hit my head a lot and walked away with a lot of bruises from the harness. However, none of the training was that difficult. Therefore, the easiest part of Airborne would have to be sleeping and eating because I was always tired and hungry.

CDT Bullis: The hardest part about Airborne was definitely the heat. The weather in Georgia is very different from here in the Northeast. While we have days of 90-degree heat, Georgia adds to that heat 80-90% humidity. You start sweating buckets the minute you walk outside. We spent most afternoons continuing to train in Category 5 weather. It is not fun and if you let it, the heat can really get to you, both physically and mentally. The easiest part about Airborne school was the training. All of the training is focused on teaching your body to react a certain way. The Black Hats (NCO trainers) are experts who are incredibly demanding. You practice every part of jumping out of airplanes so that your body knows how to react when you are too nervous to think.

What was your favorite/least favorite thing about Airborne?

CDT Persoon: My favorite part about Airborne was the people. Our company had a lot of cadets but there was also a strong mix of Privates, NCOs, Officers, Marines, Navy, and Air Force. It was really fun to have that strong mix because with that mix comes a lot of different personalities, good and bad, which helped add to the whole Airborne experience. My least favorite part about Airborne was the heat and the humidity. It was bearable but at times made the day uncomfortable.

CDT Bullis: My favorite part about Airborne was meeting all the different people. There were officers, privates, NCO’s and other cadets from across the country. You learn to respect the rank, but it was pretty much an even playing field once training started. At first I was intimidated by all the NCO’s, but many of them had as much trouble on the swing landing trainer as I did. My least favorite part was the loud and forceful “counseling” I received from an impatient Black Hat when I was having some initial difficulty on the 34-foot tower. He clearly demonstrated the proper way to give a “butt-chewing” – and I didn’t enjoy it very much. (But I laugh about it, now)

What did you learn from Airborne?

CDT Bullis: The most important thing that I learned was to trust your training. The Army has been teaching the same basic skills needed to jump out of an airplane since my parents went to Airborne school 31 years ago. There is a reason for that: it works. Don’t think the Army is going to put you through all this training just to watch you fail. They want you to pass, but you have to earn the right to pass. You have to do your part and listen, try, and trust the NCOs.

CDT Persoon: The most important thing I learned while I was at Airborne was to trust your instincts and training. While practicing my PLFs, I would sometimes over think it and then mess it up. But the second I just let my body fall naturally, everything fell into place. Therefore, landing safely on the ground is a surprisingly natural thing to do and your body reacts in a certain way to keep it safe. However, keeping feet and knees together is critical and that is something that is constantly reinforced throughout Airborne.

What had you wished you’d known before you left for Airborne?

CDT Persoon: The pull-ups were something that I knew we would have to do at Airborne but I did not practice them as much as I should have before I left. Before Airborne, I was more concerned about my running and therefore focused on that the most. Unfortunately, I had to be assisted on my pull-ups and at times I felt like a weak little girl that wasn’t earning her place at Airborne. There were two or three girls who could actually do pull-ups on their own while everyone else needed assistance as well, but I wish I had been able to do them on my own just for my own satisfaction.