

ANCHORS AWAY

SUMMER
2020

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WITH A 2020 TWIST

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to dedicate this edition of Anchors Away to Captain David Dawson (Class of 1985) and Lieutenant Patrick Connor (Class of 1985). Both gentlemen were graduates of the UNC NROTC program, and both of them tragically lost their lives while on active duty. Their lives, legacy, and sacrifice are exemplary of what it means to be a naval officer and a testament to the precious nature of human life. Their memory is still alive and well not only within the UNC NROTC Alumni Association, but also within the Tar Heel Battalion today. May this edition of Anchors Aweigh honor their memory and serve as a reminder to the next generation of UNC midshipmen of the sacrifice of these two incredible men.

I would like to thank CAPT James Day, Capt Jim Wilson, LCDR Geoff Owen, MIDN 1/C Katy Strong, MIDN 1/C Aaron Keech, and MIDN 3/C Nolan Fazen for their time and assistance in producing this edition of Anchors Aweigh. Each one of them took time out of their lives to talk to me about their experiences and, in the case of MIDN Strong, help me put everything together. They made this all possible.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the class of 2020 for their graduation and commissioning this year. I know that it was not the ideal way to conclude your college careers, but all worked very hard and each one of you will most certainly do well going forward into your careers as officers in the Navy and Marine Corps. A special thank you to ENS Amadeush Skoczek, ENS Margarita Ayala, ENS William Verwoerd, and 2Lt Matthew Guerrero for contributing to the “Parting Shots” segment of this edition of Anchors Aweigh.



CO'S MESSAGE

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BATTALION,

AS WE SAIL INTO THE FALL 2020 SEMESTER, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THIS BATTALION UNDERSTANDS OUR FUTURE DESTINATION. OUR GOAL IS TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR FULLEST POTENTIAL AND DEVELOP YOU AS LEADERS.

WHAT EXACTLY DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU? THIS MEANS THAT WE WILL BE MAKING A GREATER PUSH TOWARDS DECENTRALIZING DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. MEMBERS OF THIS BATTALION WILL BE ENTRUSTED WITH TASKS THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER. THEY WILL BE CHALLENGED TO FIND CREATIVE SOLUTIONS AND TAKE RISKS TO COMPLETE THOSE TASKS JUST AS A SHIP REQUIRES THE EFFORT OF ALL ITS SAILORS TO SAIL, SO TOO WILL OUR BATTALION REQUIRE ALL HANDS TO INVEST IN THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS OF THEIR PEERS. OUR BATTALION WILL WORK TOWARDS FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT THAT ALLOWS YOU TO UNLEASH YOUR INITIATIVE AND BECOME THE LEADER YOU ASPIRE TO BE.

THE JOURNEY TO HELPING YOU ACHIEVE YOUR FULLEST POTENTIAL AS A LEADER, HOWEVER, WOULD BE INCOMPLETE IF IT WERE NOT ALSO SUPPLEMENTED BY AN EXCELLENT TRAINING PROGRAM. AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE STRIVING FOR: EXCELLENCE. ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE REQUIRES THAT THE TRAINING YOU ALL RECEIVE THIS SEMESTER IS RELEVANT, MEANINGFUL, AND APPLICABLE NOT JUST IN THE FLEET, BUT IN YOUR DAILY LIVES AS WELL. THESE CRITERIA WILL BE OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EVERYTHING THAT WE DO GOING FORWARD.

UNDOUBTEDLY, WE WILL FACE TURBULENT WATERS AND CHALLENGES. MISTAKES WILL BE MADE, BUT THAT IS EXPECTED. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE MAKE MISTAKES NOW, AND LEARN FROM THOSE MISTAKES, AS OPPOSED TO MAKING THOSE MISTAKES IN THE FLEET. BUT DO NOT FOR ONE MOMENT LET MISTAKES DEFINE YOU, OR BEGIN TO DOUBT YOURSELF. YOU BEING HERE WITH US TODAY IS ALREADY A TESTAMENT TO YOUR WILLPOWER. CLASS OF 2024, GO FORTH AND CONQUER THIS FALL SEMESTER, AND KNOW THAT YOU WILL HAVE FELLOW SHIPMATES THERE FOR YOU THAT WILL HELP YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY IN THIS JOURNEY.

SIGNED,

MIDN 1/C VICTOR PEREZ, BATTALION CO



XO'S MESSAGE

BATTALION,

OVER THE SUMMER WE ALL MOVED ONE STEP CLOSER TO COMMISSIONING BY CLASSING UP. HOWEVER, PROGRESSING THROUGH THE NROTC TRAINING PROGRAM MEANS MORE THAN JUST RANKING UP EACH YEAR. TO DEVELOP AS A LEADER, YOU NEED TO CONTINUALLY LOOK AT WHERE YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU WANT TO BE. I ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO PURSUE EXCELLENCE IN ALL THAT THEY DO, REGARDLESS OF RANK OR BILLET.

4/C – WE'RE EXCITED TO HAVE YOU AS PART OF OUR UNIT. GET TO KNOW THE UPPERCLASSMEN AND PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH. DON'T BE SO AFRAID TO MAKE MISTAKES THAT YOU MISS OUT ON VALUABLE LEARNING EXPERIENCES. IF YOU NEED HELP, REACH OUT – THE JOURNEY TO BECOMING AN OFFICER IS NOT A SOLITARY ONE.

3/C – NOW THAT YOU'RE DONE WITH YOUR FIRST YEAR AND OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT, IT CAN BE TEMPTING TO TAKE A BACK SEAT. DON'T. MAKE CONCRETE GOALS FOR THE REMAINDER OF YOUR TIME HERE. WHEN YOU REACH THOSE GOALS, MAKE NEW ONES, AND CONTINUE THE CYCLE.

2/C – TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR CAREER BY LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. AS UPPER-CLASSMEN, YOU WILL SOON BE RESPONSIBLE FOR RUNNING MANY OF THE BATTALION OPERATIONS. IF YOU HAVE IDEAS FOR HOW THE BATTALION CAN BE IMPROVED, SPEAK UP. BRUSH UP ON YOUR CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES, AS MANY STAFF BILLETS INVOLVE WORKING WITH ACTIVE DUTY OFFICERS.

1/C – WE ARE NINE MONTHS OUT FROM COMMISSIONING. WE'VE COME FAR FROM DAY 1 OF NSO, BUT WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO, AND ONLY A FEW MONTHS LEFT BEFORE THE TRAINING WHEELS COME OFF. TAKE YOURSELF SERIOUSLY AND HOLD A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR EVERYONE AROUND YOU. ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONALISM ARE KEY.

TO EVERYONE: DON'T FORGET THAT THIS BATTALION IS A TEAM. MUTUAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE WILL ONLY MAKE US STRONGER. WHETHER YOU'RE NEW TO CHAPEL HILL OR REMEMBER LOSING THE WARDROOM DOOR, I CHALLENGE YOU TO INVEST IN YOUR PEERS' DEVELOPMENT AS MUCH AS YOUR OWN.

HOOYAH TAR HEELS, AND WELCOME BACK!

SIGNED,

MIDN 1/C MIKAYLA PATRICK, BATTALION XO



CMC'S MESSAGE

BATTALION,

I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A WARM WELCOME BACK TO OUR 1/C, 2/C, AND 3/C AS WELL AS AN EXCITED 'WELCOME ABOARD!' TO OUR NEW 4/C. THIS SEMESTER I WILL BE SERVING AS THE UNC NROTC BATTALION COMMAND MASTER CHIEF. THIS ROLE ENABLES ME TO OVERSEE DISCIPLINARY POLICIES, ENSURE PROPER USE OF BATTALION SPACES, MANAGE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OUR MIDSHIPMEN, AND ADVISE THE MIDSHIPMAN COMMANDING AND EXECUTIVE OFFICERS. THE CO, XO, AND I COMPRISE THE BATTALION TRIAD, AND ALONG WITH THE BATTALION STAFF, WE HAVE WORKED DILIGENTLY THIS SUMMER TO PROVIDE RELEVANT AND ENGAGING TRAINING FOR THE BATTALION AS WE LOOK TO NAVIGATE AN UNCERTAIN FALL SEMESTER.

THE UNC NROTC UNIT HAS ALWAYS LOOKED TO CHALLENGING TIMES AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH AND OFFICER DEVELOPMENT. DURING WORLD WAR II, THIS MEANT EXPANDING THE UNIT AND ADDING FLIGHT TRAINING PIPELINES IN ORDER TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE NAVY AND OUR NATION. MORE RECENTLY, THE UNC NROTC BATTALION HAS PRODUCED SEVERAL ESTEEMED NAVAL AND MARINE CORPS OFFICERS WHO HAVE DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES WHILE SERVING IN SUPPORT OF OPERATIONS ENDURING FREEDOM AND IRAQI FREEDOM. TODAY IN LIGHT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, OUR UNIT FACES A DIFFERENT AND UNCERTAIN CHALLENGE. JUST AS THOSE WHO HAVE COME BEFORE US, WE MUST EMBRACE THE UNKNOWN WHILE MAINTAINING THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF PROFESSIONAL, MORAL, PERSONAL, AND PHYSICAL DETERMINATION. THE SAILORS AND MARINES WE MAY ONE DAY BE PRIVILEGED TO LEAD DESERVE COMPETENT AND COURAGEOUS LEADERS. WE NOW HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEST OURSELVES MOVING INTO THE NEW SEMESTER.

TO THE 4/C, I AM EXCITED TO HAVE YOU ABOARD. THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS SERVING IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY OR MARINE CORPS. A LOT WILL BE EXPECTED OF YOU DURING YOUR FIRST YEAR, BUT LOOK TOWARDS YOUR CLASSMATES AND UPPERCLASSMEN FOR GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT.

TO THE 3/C, LAST YEAR WAS GREAT... BUT IT IS OVER. THE BAR HAS BEEN RAISED AND I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU CONTINUE TO DEVELOP YOUR LEADERSHIP ABILITIES THIS UPCOMING YEAR.

TO THE 2/C, YOU ARE NOW LESS THAN 2 YEARS AWAY FROM COMMISSIONING. YOU ARE UPPERCLASSMEN AND THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT. I AM EAGER TO SEE WHAT THIS YEAR HAS IN STORE FOR ALL OF YOU.

TO MY FELLOW 1/C, IT HAS BEEN A LONG 3 YEARS HOWEVER THIS IS NOT OUR VICTORY LAP. LET'S RELY ON ONE ANOTHER TO CONTINUALLY IMPROVE AND STRIVE TO BE OFFICERS WORTHY OF WEARING THE CLOTH OF OUR NATION.

HOOYAH, OORAH, AND LET'S GET SOME.

SIGNED,

MIDN 1/C JOHN SHEA, BATTALION CMC



A portrait of a young man with blonde hair, smiling, wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and blue tie. The background is a blurred green foliage.

GOODBYE FOR NOW

A FAREWELL TO MIDN 3/C NOLAN FAZEN

The Tarheel Battalion has midshipmen from all walks of life. Some of us have been dreaming about commissioning since we were children, and others decided to join the NROTC program to pay for college. Regardless of what our motivations are, we are all working hard towards a common goal and we want to see the fruits of our labor. However, MIDN 4/C Nolan Fazen is putting his career, college experience, and life on hold to spend two years in Costa Rica doing humanitarian work and conducting religious services. MIDN Fazen is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and one of their central tenets is service to others. LDS asks its younger members to do a two-year-long mission trip in a foreign country as part of a curriculum to become a full member of the church.

Despite the very large time commitment that this mission trip requires, MIDN Fazen did not know if he was going to go on the trip until very recently. A lifelong member of the church, MIDN Fazen had always heard about different missions and the thought that he might go on one himself was always there, but it was never at the forefront of his mind. About a year ago, MIDN Fazen sat down with one of his mentors, who is a leader in the church, and they discussed his plans for the future, specifically those regarding whether or not he will take on a mission from LDS.

Preparation

Most of us couldn't imagine making such a drastic lifestyle change so suddenly for two years. One of the biggest questions I had for MIDN Fazen was how he was preparing for his mission. At the time of my interview with MIDN Fazen, he had yet to leave and still had many of the same questions I did. But one of the things that MIDN Fazen did say was that he was spending a lot of time practicing his Spanish, a skill that will be essential as he travels to a foreign country where English speakers are in the minority. He has been studying as much as he can about his mission and is taking everything very seriously.

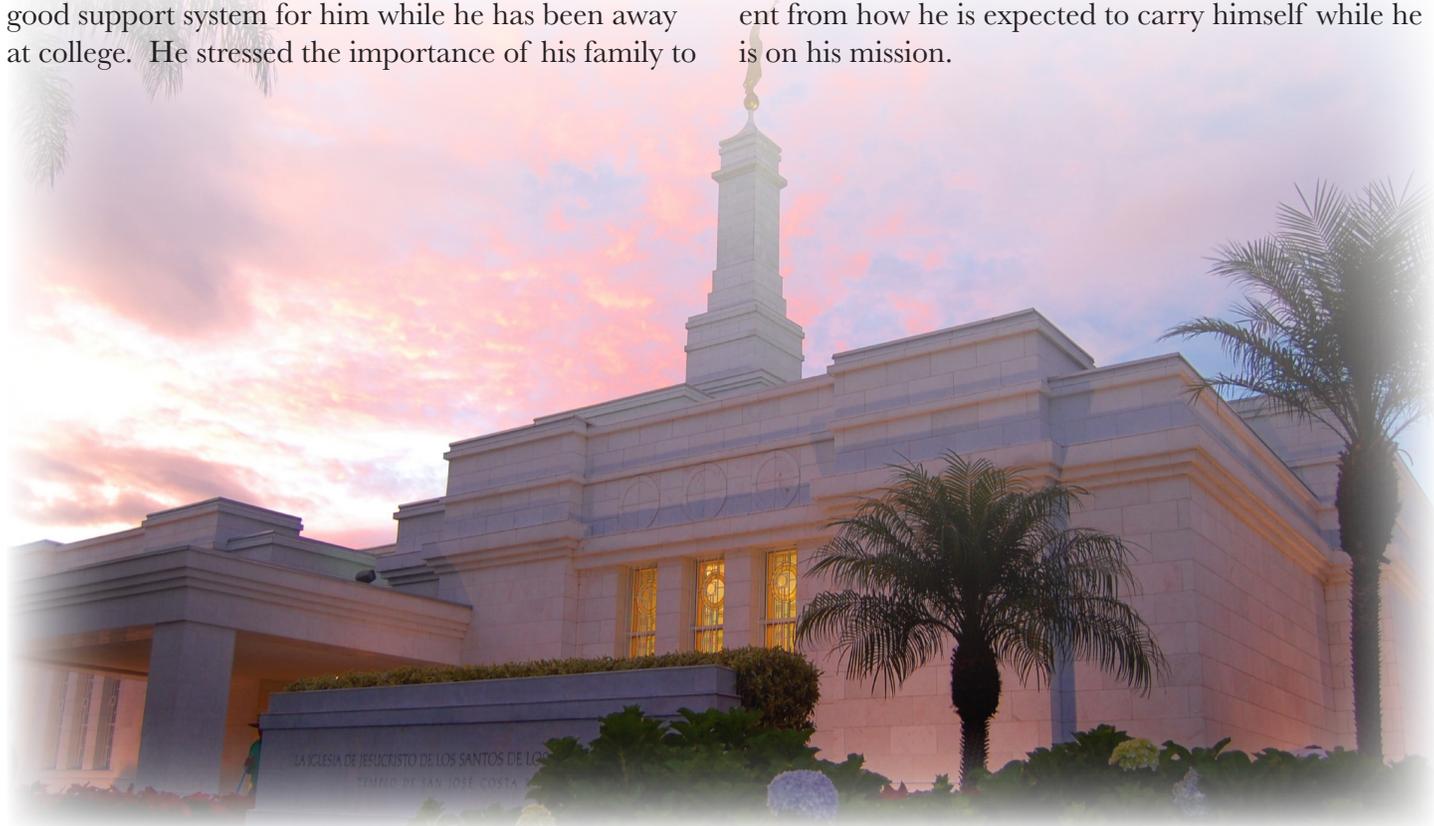
One of the things that MIDN Fazen did say that he couldn't prepare for was leaving his friends and family. He knows there will be a lot of shell shock in the first few days, but from what I could tell from our conversation, this didn't deter him one bit. MIDN Fazen told me that he felt that spending a year living away from his family at college has helped him to prepare for the major adjustment. He is very close with his family, and his dad is his role model; it was his father, he said, that taught him to stick up for himself. MIDN Fazen also has several siblings, but is closest to the oldest of his two younger brothers and has tried to set an example for him. MIDN Fazen confides in his older sister and his mother and they have been a good support system for him while he has been away at college. He stressed the importance of his family to

me, and that it will be difficult leaving them, but that they have been supportive and are excited to see him embark on a great adventure.

The Mission

MIDN Fazen will begin a virtual training syllabus shortly after classes begin this Fall. This is different than previous years, where missionaries would travel to a central location and receive in-person training on culture, language, and religion. Once MIDN Fazen and his peers complete this training, they will all be sent to their assigned countries. Some people will go to countries in Central America where religious freedom is more widely accepted, while others will go to places that are not as permissive.

MIDN Fazen will primarily be doing humanitarian work including disaster relief and clean up, as well as helping out individuals and communities with whatever they might need. He will also be conducting religious services for the locals. I asked him how he felt about leading a dual life as both an aspiring naval officer, where you must appear to be neutral in all aspects of your beliefs, and as a very active member of his church. He feels that the difference isn't so distinct. As future leaders, we are taught to serve others, especially those we lead and be selfless in everything that we do. MIDN Fazen says that this idea isn't too different from how he is expected to carry himself while he is on his mission.



Above: An LDS temple in San Juan, Costa Rica.

Of course, it is important to know what your strengths are whenever you do anything new. MIDN Fazen's ROTC experience and the attitude he takes towards learning a skill and being effective have proven to be quite helpful as he gets ready to leave. He told me that he has taken all of his training very seriously thus far, as he cannot accomplish his mission without it. MIDN Fazen also thinks of his straightforwardness as one of his strengths. He will be placed in uncomfortable situations that will require honesty and candor. Furthermore, his willingness to discuss the religious goals of his mission with others will benefit him as he tries to meet the goals set for him by his religious leadership back home.

Reflections on the Previous Year

Since MIDN Fazen won't be here in the Fall to greet the new 4/C, I wanted him to reflect on his experiences and give some good advice to everyone who will be joining the unit in his absence. The one thing that he said was the most important was to make sure that you can rely on your classmates. MIDN Fazen told me that he gets along extremely well with his class and that they are all supportive of his mission. He also credits much of his good experience to the upperclassmen that mentored him and helped him learn the ropes.

A Little More About Nolan

Even before college, MIDN Fazen always had high expectations of himself. In high school, he became an Eagle Scout, an accomplishment that he believes has prepared him for both mission work and military service. It was in the Boy Scouts where he learned his service work ethic and gained early leadership experience. For him, it was a natural fit into his life where his church, family, and values influenced him so heavily growing up. He emphasized the focus on service that Boy Scouts taught him, and in many ways, he has taken that outlook and applied it to other aspects of his life.

When MIDN Fazen isn't studying or fulfilling his ROTC duties, you will often find him talking about fishing. Most of my conversations with him over the past year have revolved around fishing in one way or another, so I asked him what prompted his interest in the sport. He told me that he and his friends would make jokes about going on a fishing trip together, and

he decided to pick up a fishing rod from Walmart and give it a try. He ended up enjoying it and has tried his best to go fishing as much as he can before he leaves on his trip. Unfortunately, since MIDN Fazen will be so busy with his mission work, he will not be able to maintain his hobby while he is in Costa Rica.

Parting Shots

"I'll leave people with a few things. I want to thank everybody for making our unit great. I really enjoyed my time with the Battalion so far and I'm looking forward to finishing my time later down the road. I felt welcome in the Armory, I was able to find people to rely on and support each other, and I'm thankful that I was able to meet everyone. Please keep that up. Keep being supportive, reliable, welcoming and most of all have faith in one another. I'll see y'all in two years."

-MIDN 3/C Nolan Fazen

Goodbye and Good Luck

On behalf of everyone in the Battalion, I wanted to wish MIDN Fazen luck on his mission. We are all proud of you and we can't wait to hear back from you about your experiences. Stay safe, and have fun. ⚓



Above: MIDN Fazen with his sister Maddie and his brothers Cooper (left) and Collin (right).

OCS

A TIME-HONORED TRADITION WITH A 2020 TWIST

This summer, MIDN 1/C Aaron Keech and MIDN 1/C Joshua Heard graduated from Marine Corps Officer Candidate School (OCS). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OCS had make several changes in order to continue training. Officer candidates were quarantined for two weeks before beginning their training and they had to wear masks. Now that these Marine Options have earned the title of Marine, their sights are set on preparing for The Basic School (TBS). I had the chance to speak to MIDN Keech about his experiences and the time he spent in Quantico.

Quarantine

For two weeks, all of the officer candidates at OCS were confined to their rooms to ensure that they would not infect everyone else with COVID-19. The initial nerves of arriving at OCS quickly faded, as boredom and monotony set in. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were served in the form of box lunches, and MIDN Keech was telling me that many of the officer candidates were losing their motivation. Once the mandatory quarantine ended, everyone was happy to finally do something. In many ways, MIDN Keech said that the quarantine made OCS a little easier, in that everybody was eager to get out of their rooms and come one step closer to becoming a Marine.

The Hardest Thing

This year's officer candidates had the benefit of a large class of Marine Options that graduated OCS last year. All of the Marine Platoon's training was geared towards preparing for the rigors of OCS and was aided by a large class of recent graduates. Gunnery Sergeant Weinhardt, our AMOI, was also a sergeant instructor at OCS, adding to MIDN Keech and Heard's training. As a result, MIDN Keech did not ever feel as if he was going to fail. He never recalled

being challenged by any particular event. Rather, the hardest thing was maintaining the proper mindset. OCS is, by design, a stress test for aspiring Marine Corps officers. Even if you are doing everything right, the sergeant instructors are supposed to make you feel as if you could be doing more. This "game", as it is often described, is one of the hardest parts of OCS. MIDN Keech said that it was very difficult doing exactly what was expected of you, yet being told you were incompetent.

Another challenge that MIDN Keech described was the discomfort caused by the masks officer candidates were forced to wear. While transitioning between events, the various platoons would conduct administrative movements where they would march in formation. With sergeant instructors "motivating" the candidates, the pace quickly increased to almost a run. MIDN Keech vividly recalls laboring to breathe through his mask during these administrative movements as he carried his 25-pound assault pack from evolution to evolution. While he admitted that this was a relatively minor issue, it nonetheless added to the challenge that the Marine Corps presents to its officer candidates.

The Easiest Thing

MIDN Keech was very well prepared physically and mentally for OCS. Despite the rigorous PT program designed by the OCS staff, MIDN Keech said that the workouts were manageable and that he never had any major difficulties. While it may seem daunting for younger midshipmen to prepare for OCS, you can succeed as long as you take your preparation seriously.

Despite the many inconveniences placed upon the officer candidates by the COVID-19 pandemic, they were spared from many of the "games." This reprieve allowed them to get more sleep at night, and MIDN Keech said that he never fell asleep during the

various classes taught at OCS. The additional sleep allowed the officer candidates to be better prepared for the next day’s tasks and overall made up for a lot of the unique circumstances caused by COVID-19.

Billet Holding

Aside from the physical demands placed on you during OCS, holding a billet is arguably one of the most challenging parts of OCS. Billets were assigned to every officer candidate throughout the 6-week program in 48-hour shifts. MIDN Keech served as his platoon’s platoon sergeant. The candidate platoon sergeant and the candidate platoon commander always have to be on the same page, and always give the same answers. If the platoon sergeant gives a different answer to a specific question than the platoon commander, the platoon sergeant is reprimanded for undermining his platoon commander.

Platoon billet holders also have to know the training schedule forwards and backward. Any mistake, regardless of whose “fault” it is, is always the cause of the platoon billet holders. This is part of the training and is designed to develop the candidates’ mental toughness. As a result, candidate billet holders are always on edge. Each candidate is evaluated on their leadership skills and even the smallest mistake can result in a hit on your evaluations. These evaluations come from both the sergeant instructors and the candidates in your platoon, so it is imperative that you do a good job.

After holding a billet, MIDN Keech said that he was much happier. For him, everything drastically improved. After he was done with his billet, he would go out of his way to help the billet holders. One of the things that MIDN Keech would go out of his way to do was to sound off to the candidate platoon sergeant. He made it a point to be an asset to his platoon and always try to make the candidate platoon leaders’ lives easier.

Tips for OCS

I asked MIDN Keech for some advice for younger midshipmen who will be going to OCS over the next few years. Here is what he had to say:

“Be a Good Dude”

Your life is going to be much harder if you

don’t make friends. Talk to everyone. Be nice to everyone. MIDN Keech noticed a difference between the candidates who were nice and friendly and those who weren’t. He recalled two candidates who were rackmates and hated each other. This, he said, made both of their lives much more miserable than it had to be. MIDN Keech also said that the intangible things make all of the difference. If you can convince your platoon to respect you, it will pay off when you hold billets and when they evaluate you.

“Don’t Get Flustered”

Don’t stress about what you don’t know. UNC prepares you well for the physical and academic rigors of OCS. Know that OCS is a test and always maintain your bearing. The sergeant instructors will find what makes you uncomfortable and exploit it. According to MIDN Keech, having bearing is one of the most important things that will help you succeed at OCS.

“You’re Going to Want That Letter During Week 3”

Many of the candidates in MIDN Keech’s platoon told their friends and family not to send them letters. However, even just a simple hello can mean all the difference when things get difficult. One of MIDN Keech’s regrets was that he told people not to write to him while he was at OCS. He said that he noticed other candidates were “bummed” when they didn’t hear their name at mail call.

“Be Fast”

MIDN Keech said that exceptional physical fitness is the single most important thing at OCS. If you are slow, the sergeant instructors will notice. You don’t have to be the fastest guy in the platoon, but don’t be towards the back of the pack. Since nearly everything at OCS is physical in one way or another, being fit will help you immensely and it will allow you to focus on the other things.

Final Thoughts

OCS hangs over the head of every single Marine option that matriculates through the ROTC program. Now that MIDN Keech has successfully

reached this milestone in his career, he is looking forward to TBS. One of the things that he learned was that hiking was much more important than running. He mentioned that OCS is a screener for the Marine Corps to determine who can and cannot handle being an officer in charge of Marines. This helped him gain a perspective of what training truly matters to his development as a Marine officer. This is not to say to Marine Option midshipmen who have not completed OCS that OCS does not matter, rather it is important to understand what the function of OCS is and how to be successful while you are there.

MIDN Keech says he is ready for the new style of training at TBS. He is motivated and ready to be one step closer to commissioning and hopefully receiving one of his top choices for his military occupational specialty (MOS).

One of the last things that MIDN Keech said to me was how great he felt when they finally called him a “Marine.” Our consortium XO, Maj Michael Arguello, was part of the ceremony where he received the coveted eagle, globe, and anchor. He described it as “the best feeling of his life.”

MIDN Keech and the rest of the class of 2021 still has a lot of work to do before they commission next May, but we are all very proud of him and MIDN Heard for completing one of the biggest milestones in their careers. Good work gentlemen and Semper Fi! ⚓

Below: MIDN Keech stands in formation during a morning PT session at OCS.

Next Page: LT Patrick Connor poses in front of his A-6 Intruder aircraft.





LOOKING BACK
AN ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

Every year the Battalion hosts an alumni panel where we have the opportunity to talk about various topics regarding leadership, military life, and how to avoid some common JO mistakes. Rarely do any midshipmen ever ask these alumni about what life was like when they were going through the program. Since this year has been historical in many ways, I wanted to take the opportunity to ask three members of the Alumni Association what life was like during their time at UNC. They told stories, answered my questions, and reflected on their time as a student and a midshipman.

The first alumnus I spoke with was CAPT James Day (class of 1973). CAPT Day was a surface warfare officer and served on everything from mine-sweepers to the first Aegis-capable destroyers. He also served in the Pentagon and had command of a Spruance-class destroyer. I then spoke to Mr. Jim Wilson (class of 1982). Capt. Wilson graduated as a physics major and commissioned into the Marine Corps. He was designated as an artillery officer but was later reassigned as a combat data services officer where he led the effort to digitize a lot of the Marine Corps' administrative work. Finally, I spoke with Mr. Geoff Owen, a former JV basketball player, and a college program midshipman. LCDR Owen commissioned as a surface warfare officer and was assigned to a mine-sweeper in Charleston, SC. During his first sea tour, LCDR Owen deployed to the Persian Gulf where his ship conducted mine clearing operations and served as a mother ship for a SEAL team.

CAPT James Day, USN (Ret.), Class of 1973

CAPT Day was the child of two naval officers. He always knew that he would pursue a career in the Navy, and when the time came to apply to colleges, he wanted to keep his options open. CAPT Day considered the Naval Academy, the ROTC program, and the corps of cadets at Virginia Tech. After a lot of thinking, CAPT Day decided to accept his NROTC scholarship at UNC.

During his scholarship application process, CAPT Day had an interview with the unit CO, who was a Marine colonel at the time, which he credits as being a deciding factor in coming to UNC. When he first reported to the armory in Chapel Hill, there was no new student orientation (NSO) program. Instead, the first day consisted of uniform issue, book issue, and the unit's gunnery sergeant providing the new mid-

shipmen with a healthy dose of motivation. His first few days at the unit were made easier by the familiarity he had with the CO.

As a student who had not yet declared a major, CAPT Day tried to take as many courses as he could to transfer over college credit he received in high school. At the time, the Navy was encouraging its midshipmen to pursue degrees in hard sciences, which motivated him to take German, a language that many Chemistry majors took due to the number of famous German chemists and physicists. The Navy was also encouraging its midshipmen to take computer science courses however, this requirement was waived because the CO failed the computer science course his midshipmen were supposed to take. CAPT Day was never interested in any of the technical fields, and after running into roadblocks during registration, he ended up taking a number of history classes. He describes his relationships with professors as hit or miss, but he recalls having a couple of professors who were very kind to him. When CAPT Day graduated, he was a few credits shy of a double major, but due to early hiccups with registration, he received his degree in History.

CAPT Day was assigned as a Surface Warfare Officer, and when it came time to pick his first ship, he wanted to be on the smallest vessel that the Navy had. Before he reported aboard his first ship, he first completed the then-optional Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS) which is now referred to as the Basic Division Officer's Course (BDOC). His first assignment was to the USS Fortify (MSO 446), a mine-sweeper home-ported in Guam. Initially, CAPT Day had a difficult time meeting several important career milestones, because his CO at the time would not sign off on his personnel qualification standards (PQS). Once his second CO took command, he was given a SWO letter after he demonstrated that he was a proficient leader, shiphandler, and demonstrated technical competence. The wardroom on the Fortify was only 6 officers, so CAPT Day eventually filled almost every single billet on board the ship from 1st LT to XO.

After his first tour, CAPT Day would go on to serve on the USS Spruance (DD 963) as a navigator; the USS Caron (DD 970) as both the navigator and weapons officer; the USS Portland (LSD 37) as the Chief Engineer; the USS DeWert (FFG 45) as XO; and the USS Reuben James (FFG 57) as the CO. He also completed two Pentagon tours, the first of which included efforts to increase the percentage of females in the Navy. His various deployments include chasing

a Soviet aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean Sea; going to South America during the Falklands War; participating in the raid on Colonel Kaddafi's forces in Libya; and visiting Vladivostok after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

I asked CAPT Day about his leadership style and what lessons we can learn from his experience as the CO of a warship. He stressed the importance of being a teacher first. This encourages a very open and honest atmosphere where your subordinates are not afraid to come talk to you. CAPT Day also preached the importance of learning your sailor's jobs, as it makes you better at yours. You may not understand everything that is going on, but you can help offer solutions, and of course, get your hands dirty. In that same vein, he also stressed the importance of forcing your sailors who are experts at their specific job to lead other sailors. Even though they might be great at what they do, it doesn't mean that they are great leaders. Finally, he left me with this piece of advice: be a pirate. This does not mean that you should do anything illegal or immoral. To CAPT Day, being a pirate means that you get together with your men and listen to them. You figure out what is wrong and then you fix that problem.

Former Capt Jim Wilson, USMC, Class of 1982

Capt Wilson also grew up in a military family. He recalls going to an air show and watching the Blue Angels and being inspired to join the military. Capt Wilson never considered the Naval Academy, because he didn't want to go to college in the northeast. He decided on UNC and the NROTC program.

When he arrived at the unit, Capt Wilson said that he was treated quite well. There was no NSO program at the time, and instead, the emphasis was on the naval science curriculum. During those days, naval architecture was taught to all 4/C regardless of option, followed by a military history course from the history department. Outside of his NROTC curriculum, Capt Wilson was a physics major, a decision he made before he even enrolled at UNC.

Much like CAPT Day, Capt Wilson recalls a fair amount of anti-war sentiment on campus at the time. Nobody felt welcome wearing a uniform anywhere on campus, and the professors did not work with midshipmen whose schedules were exceedingly busy. At the time, the unit had a shooting team and a traveling drill team, but even if you weren't a

member of one of these teams, you were still busy. I asked Capt Wilson what he did outside of ROTC, but between his military training and studying, he said that he did not have time to do much else. Even though the workload on the midshipmen was pretty heavy, Capt Wilson said that he and his peers wouldn't have it any other way.

Even though life in the Battalion was very demanding, he still had time to celebrate the National Championship victory in 1982. They also celebrated the Navy and Marine Corps' birthdays, but instead of the consortium-wide Fall ball that we hold today, each school held their own birthday balls. UNC, NC State, and Duke were not yet in a consortium together, and NC State did not have their own unit yet.

During the summer before his senior year, Capt Wilson attended and graduated OCS, describing it as very similar to what midshipmen experience today. However, he said that OCS was not a focus of their training, and both Navy and Marine Option midshipmen trained together more often than not.

Shortly after completing his military occupational specialty (MOS) training, Capt Wilson deployed to Beirut, Lebanon after one of his TBS classmates was killed in the barracks bombing. In Beirut, Capt Wilson and his unit conducted security for the US and UK embassies for the next six months. Upon his return to the United States, Capt Wilson requested to be redesignated as a combat data service officer, a brand-new MOS at the time.

As a combat data service officer, it was Capt Wilson's job to help digitize the Marine Corps. The combat data service MOS was very officer-heavy at the time, but his unit worked together to help maintain computer systems and develop unique solutions for various units in the 2nd Marine Division. He told me that the Marine Corps had no clear goal for what they wanted out of his unit, but they focused on experimentation and getting everyone exposed to computers. At that time, he said most people in the 2nd Marine Division had never seen a PC, let alone used one.

Capt Wilson left the Marine Corps as a Captain, and he returned to Chapel Hill to attend law school. There, he described the many adjustments that he had to make. One of the things that struck him the most was the fact that nobody would move out of the way for him in the halls of the law school. "People would jump out of your way as a captain in the Marine Corps, but now I was bumping shoulders with 22-year-olds," he said of his first few days as a

student. He also had to cope with only caring for himself versus being concerned with the affairs of a full platoon of Marines. However, Capt Wilson does credit his military experience as being beneficial to his work ethic as a student. He no longer thought of school as school, but rather as a job.

Former LCDR Geoff Owen, USN, Class of 1985

LCDR Owen's story begins in a slightly different way. A standout high school basketball player, LCDR Owen received many offers to play basketball at smaller colleges. He also received an Army ROTC scholarship and was an alternate for the Navy ROTC scholarship, but neither opportunities were at schools he was interested in. He had always wanted to go to UNC, and for a basketball player, there was hardly a better place. Roy Williams had just taken over the head coaching job from Dean Smith, and Michael Jordan was a top-notch recruit.

However, LCDR Owen's basketball career was cut short after not making the varsity team his sophomore year. When he realized that he would no longer be playing basketball, he spoke with the unit XO about joining NROTC as a college program midshipman. Ordinarily, joining this late as a college programmer would have required you to go to the Naval Science Institute for one summer to catch up on all of the training that you missed, but LCDR Owen had that requirement waived by the XO in exchange for taking a heavy naval science course load.

At first, he made many dumb mistakes, and he recalls having an extremely difficult time figuring out how to wear his uniform properly. The unit was primarily Marine option-led at that time, and they were very strict. However, his classmates helped get him up to speed and by his second semester in the program, he was given the billet of platoon sergeant.

Close order drill was one of LCDR Owen's weaknesses, so in true Navy and Marine Corps fashion, he was charged with leading his platoon in a drill competition. Despite hours of practice, the drill instructors grading the competition that day decided to throw him a curveball. Being a brand-new midshipman, he had no idea what to do, but his classmates helped him out by whispering the commands he was supposed to give under their breath.

LCDR Owen originally joined the unit to be a pilot, and he had 20/20 vision going into his junior year. However, at the end of the year, the vision in

his left eye worsened to 20/25. At that time, there were no surgeries to correct vision deficiencies, and the Navy required a student Naval Aviator's vision to be 20/20 uncorrected in both eyes. He was offered the choice of becoming either a Naval Flight Officer or a Surface Warfare Officer for his service assignment. After some thought, he decided on pursuing a career as a Surface Warfare Officer.

For his 1/C cruise, LCDR Owen went to Guantanamo Bay and was assigned to a destroyer doing refresher training. There he gained exposure to many of the things that he would be doing as a newly-minted ensign. The officers took him under their wing and the crew was very friendly to him. During their downtime, he played basketball with the crew.

When choosing his first ship, LCDR Owen wanted to remain as close to North Carolina as he could, as his girlfriend still lived in North Carolina at the time. He selected a minesweeper out of Charleston, SC, and began his three-year reserve commitment. After only two years, he switched over to active duty and began the process of applying to the BUD/S program. Shortly after he was accepted, he got married and withdrew his application. Despite prioritizing family life, Iran began mining the Persian Gulf shortly after he was married and he was given 5 weeks' notice to deploy. Since his minesweeper was the first of its class to pass the Navy's propulsion test, it was one of the six selected to clear the Persian Gulf of mines. They began modifying the ship to ward off attacks from Iranian fast boats, including adding a chain gun and multiple .50 caliber machine gun mounts. The crew received extra training in small arms and embarked with a SEAL team to help defend the ship. LCDR Owen vividly recalls standing bridge watch with a pistol, grenade launcher, and flare gun while wearing goggles to protect his eyes from the sandstorms. At night, he would watch tracer rounds being fired by the SEALs as they would go off and do their own missions once the ship was safe from attack.

After his return to the United States, LCDR Owen would go on to serve as the navigator for the USS Virginia (CGN-38) and as an ROTC instructor at Georgia Tech. During his time at Georgia Tech, he received an MBA, taught every single course in the naval science curriculum, and also taught classes at Morehouse University.

I asked LCDR Owen to reflect on his time as

a naval officer, and he mentioned several things that stuck out to me. He recalled being very lonely when he reported to his first duty station. This was an adjustment that he was not prepared for, and according to him, it was difficult going from the very social environment of college to a more solitary existence. LCDR Owen also talked about prioritization. Junior officers are tasked with more than what is humanly possible, and it is up to them to figure out what to delegate and what is a priority. He had a very simple methodology for prioritizing things: “What will get me in trouble the fastest?” LCDR Owen also told me, along that same vein, to “get the things that matter right.” These lessons were the most critical to his development as an officer, and it helped him adjust to a lifestyle that he had no intention of living just three years prior.

Finally, LCDR Owen talked about the gravity of his experience in the Persian Gulf. He recalls looking into the water and seeing sharks and snakes and thinking, “I do not want to find myself in that water.” The dangerous fauna provided extra motivation for him to keep his crew and his ship safe. LCDR Owen also said how within seven years of commissioning, two of the midshipmen who were in his platoon when he was platoon sergeant were dead. One of them was Lieutenant Patrick Connor, and the other was Captain David Dawson. He was good friends with Mr. Dawson and ate lunch with him almost every day. After their deaths, LCDR Owen truly appreciated the gravity of his job. ⚓



PARTING SHOTS

THE CLASS OF 2020 LEAVES US WITH SOME ADVICE

“HEY EVERYONE, MY NAME IS ENS WILLIAM VERWOERDT, AND I JUST GRADUATED IN 2020 AS A STUDENT NAVAL AVIATOR. I’M IN PENSACOLA RIGHT NOW WAITING FOR FLIGHT SCHOOL TO START. I’M NOT SURE HOW COVID-19 WILL AFFECT YOUR FRESHMAN YEAR, BUT I KNOW IT CAN BE A WHIRLWIND, AT LEAST IT WAS FOR ME.

MIDN RIVERS ASKED ME TO PROVIDE A FEW WORDS OF ADVICE FOR YOU ALL, AND I HAVE TWO MAIN POINTS. THE FIRST IS FOR THE NAVY OPTIONS WHO AREN’T THE BEST AT MATH AND SCIENCE LIKE I WAS. AS YOU START TAKING CALC AND PHYSICS AND FIND YOU’RE NOT DOING THAT WELL [OR DOING VERY POORLY], DON’T FREAK OUT. IT WAS A REALLY HARD FOR ME, BUT IF I CAN GET THROUGH IT, TRUST ME, YOU CAN TOO. GO TO OFFICE HOURS AND SHOW YOU CARE AND YOU WILL SURVIVE.

THE SECOND POINT IS, WHILE YOU SHOULD WORK HARD IN SCHOOL AND GET GOOD GRADES, TO ENSURE YOU GET THE SERVICE ASSIGNMENT YOU WANT, YOU CAN’T MAKE THE MOST OF COLLEGE IF YOU DON’T TAKE A LOAD OFF AND HAVE FUN WITH YOUR FRIENDS. A LOT OF COLLEGE IS BUILDING THE TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS THAT ALLOW YOU TO KNOW WHEN YOU NEED TO BUCKLE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU CAN GO OUT AND MAKE LASTING MEMORIES WITH YOUR BUDDIES. GET TIGHT WITH YOUR CLASS ABSOLUTELY, BUT ALSO JOIN A CLUB, FRATERNITY, OR SORORITY, AND GET INVESTED IN IT. YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE WILL BE THAT MUCH RICHER IF YOU DO. I HOPE YOU ALL HAVE A GREAT COLLEGE EXPERIENCE, HOPEFULLY WITH AS LITTLE INFLUENCE FROM COVID-19 AS POSSIBLE.”

-ENS WILLIAM VERWOERDT, USN

“LIFE ISN’T TOO COMPLICATED. REMEMBER THE WORDS OF KENDRICK LAMAR, ‘I KNOW IF I’M GENEROUS AT HEART I DON’T NEED RECOGNITION. THE WAY I’M REWARDED, WELL, THAT’S GOD’S DECISION.’ SEMPER FI.”

-2LT MATTHEW GUERRERA, USMC



“HAVE EACH OTHER’S BACKS, AND TAKE CARE OF ONE ANOTHER. DON’T EVER GIVE UP, AND ENJOY EVERY MOMENT. FLY NAVY!”

-ENS AMADEUSH SKOCZEK, USN

“TAKE YOUR TIME IN THE UNIT SERIOUSLY. IT’S A TRAINING ENVIRONMENT AND MISTAKES ARE OKAY AND EVEN ENCOURAGED WHEN WE’RE ABLE TO LEARN FROM THEM. CHERISH YOUR TIME AT CAROLINA BECAUSE IT GOES SO FAST AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU’LL BE GRADUATED AND ENTERING THE FLEET. MOST IMPORTANTLY, BE EXCITED! THE NAVY AND MARINE CORPS YOU’RE ABOUT TO JOIN HAS SO MUCH TO OFFER YOU SO TAKE ADVANTAGE. GO HEELS AND FLY NAVY!”

-ENS MARGARITA AYALA, USN

ANCHORS AWEIGH STAFF

ABOUT THE EDITOR

MIDN 1/C ANDREW RIVERS IS A RUSSIAN AND PEACE, WAR, AND DEFENSE MAJOR WHO HOPES TO COMMISSION AS A STUDENT NAVAL AVIATOR THIS SPRING. IN ADDITION TO SERVING AS THE NEWSLETTER’S EDITOR, MIDN RIVERS ALSO SERVES AS ITS CHIEF HISTORICAL CORRESPONDENT, CHIEF MARINE CORPS CORRESPONDENT, CHIEF BATTALION AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT, AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR FOR ANCHORS AWEIGH. IN HIS SPARE TIME, MIDN RIVERS WORKS AS A KITCHEN ASSISTANT AT THE ALPHA CHI OMEGA SORORITY HOUSE. WHEN MIDN RIVERS ISN’T WORKING, HE SPENDS HIS TIME TAKING CARE OF THE BATTALION’S BEST HEAD OF HAIR, RIDING HIS BICYCLE AROUND THE CHAPEL HILL-CARRBORO METROPOLITAN AREA, AND KEEPING UP WITH NASCAR AND FI.



ABOUT THE ASSISTANT CREATIVE DIRECTOR

MIDN 1/C KATY STRONG IS A POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PEACE, WAR, AND DEFENSE MAJOR WHO HOPES TO COMMISSION AS A STUDENT NAVAL AVIATOR THIS SPRING. AS ANCHORS AWEIGH’S ASSISTANT CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND DIRECTOR OF QUALITY CONTROL, SHE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CREATING ONE-OF-A-KIND GRAPHICS AND ENSURING THAT MIDN RIVERS PRODUCES THE BEST PRODUCT POSSIBLE. IN ADDITION TO THIS TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITY, SHE SERVES AS THE BATTALION’S WEBMASTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA DIRECTOR. IN HER SPARE TIME, MIDN STRONG ENJOYS CROSSFIT AND HONING HER CRAFT AS A SAVVY INVESTOR, WITH HOPES OF ONE DAY JOINING CORPORATE AMERICA.

