



# ***The Black Dragon Dispatch - Fall 2021***



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## **A Message from the Commanding Officer:**

Hello Midshipmen, Family, and Friends,

Happy New Year! I hope that you and your loved ones are all safe and well. While I am excited to break into the New Year and start focusing on the many new challenges headed our way, I hope that all of us have been able to take a little bit of time to reflect on the past year. So much of leadership hinges upon reflection.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that is filled with noise, operates at a frantic pace, and is laser-focused on what is next. It is often difficult for one to find time to stop and contemplate the last few months.



This newsletter (thank you to MIDN Gilhuley and all the contributors!) is actually a great tool for us to look back on all that we were able to do in such a short time. You might think that this was any normal semester in the life of an NROTC Unit, but it was not. This unit went from 0 to 60 within weeks of the restrictions being lifted. We started this semester out with the fantastic execution of NSO (practically on an audible) and from there leapt into recreating the “in-person” ROTC dynamic that over half the unit had never experienced. We accomplished this while phasing in an almost entirely new staff. Needless to say, it could not have been done without both the outstanding leadership of the MIDN staff and the enthusiastic support of the underclassmen.





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In that vein, I want to heartily congratulate you all on your extraordinary accomplishments - both the day-to-day activities and the larger successes of the Navy Ball, New Student Orientation, Field Exercise and Cornell Military Excellence Competition. These are successes in which I take great pride and I am profoundly thankful for the outstanding performance of both the MIDN and the new Active Duty staff.

However, the reflection is not just on our laurels, but on the bigger picture. If the 4/C MIDN are anything like me when I was in their shoes (and the enthusiasm that I have seen this year demonstrates that they are), they have discovered something novel over the last 6 months. While they are all still very much the same people, they all have found something of a new identity that comes with new purpose and new responsibility. They are aware that the clock has started, and they have only four years to prepare before they will be stepping out in front of their Sailors, partnering with their Senior Enlisted, and leading. In all truth, the welfare of those Sailors and Marines will be much less dependent upon what you know, and much more upon who you are. For our 1/C MIDN, that preparation time is almost up before it's "GAME ON!"

So where have you found areas that need some "rust busting?" What aspects of your mind, body, soul, and character need more practice, more discipline, and more focus? This process never ends - rather, it is the sure way that you mature into the best possible version of yourself, and into the selfless, humble, and indomitable warrior that this Navy-Marine Corps team needs to lead our Sailors and Marines into the future.

Very Respectfully,  
CAPT P. C. de Marcellus  
Commanding Officer





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## **Officer Candidate School** by MIDN 1/C Peluso, Jack

Officer Candidates School is undoubtedly the culminating event of a Marine Option's time in NROTC. During OCS, candidates complete a number of evaluations testing qualities such as physical fitness, academic performance, and leadership potential. Individuals who do not maintain an 80% average in these categories are at risk of being dropped from the course. For those who do make the grade, OCS ends with the day that every Marine waits for: earning the title of Marine. During my own experience at OCS this past summer, I will say that there are many lessons to be learned during your six weeks in Lima company. The most important one is the ability to lead one's peers. The concept of peer leadership is deceptively simple. However, it is far more difficult in practice, especially while under distress. Military leadership is often characterized by its hierarchy of rank and billet. Small unit leaders are given accountability for a group of individuals and the authority to ensure the job gets done properly. At OCS, you will be put in charge of your peers, but you are still a candidate. You will hold no authority over them, but somehow, somehow, you need to get them to follow you. This learning process applies to both leaders and followers. The candidate in charge may not have any more experience than you, but you still need to listen and follow their plan because completing the mission relies on it. Many times platoons will run into the issue of "Too many chefs in the kitchen." This is when members of the platoon will try to execute their own plans over the assigned leader, causing confusion within the unit and taking longer to complete the mission. By the end, both leader and follower understand that the instructors will leave them alone if they work together. In my experience, the key to peer leadership is to make a clear plan, communicate it efficiently, and execute it as fast as possible. Even if the decision was wrong in the end, the instructors just want to see that you had a thought process and made a decision. They will mentor you on tactics to use for a better outcome, but they can't do anything with someone who freezes when quick decisiveness is needed.

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## **1/C Summer Cruise** by MIDN 1/C Jones, Aminah

This past summer, I completed an aviation cruise down in Jacksonville, Florida. I was with the VP-30 squadron, a training squadron for P-8's. For those who are less familiar, like I was, P-8s are used mostly for anti-submarine and reconnaissance missions and are built similarly to your average commercial airliner, minus the interior. Before my cruise, I was set on being a jet pilot, but the amazing staff over at VP-30 happened to convert me. Being a training command, I lucked out with likely the best squadron I could have been assigned to. All the pilots there have completed at least one tour and were chosen because they are good at what they do and great teachers.







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While out in Jax, I got the chance to go on a couple of flights with a full crew, operated both a P-8 and P-3 simulator, sat in on mission briefs, and even got to do a few things with a helo squadron as a bonus. On one of our flights, they let the four of us midshipmen onboard fly the plane, which was really fun, and a lot harder than it looked. The most exciting thing I saw was definitely an air to air refueling, which is absolutely insane looking. Our days weren't exactly booked back to back, and I, along with the other midshipmen there,

had a lot of liberty. I met some great pilots and NFOs out there that I still keep in contact with. They showed us around, answered all of our questions, took us out to dinner a few times, and told us all the great spots to go in the area. The time I spent having casual conversations and seeing what the community was like outside of work were most valuable to me over my time in Jacksonville. Thinking back makes me excited to start flight school soon, and I can't wait.

## **NSI Instructor Experience** by MIDN 2/C Redmond, Andrew

Compared to my fellow midshipmen, my summer cruise experience was unique and different from the traditional idea of summer training. As other cruises typically consisted of being a follower—whether it was Sea Trials, 2/C cruise, Marine Month, or OCS—attending New Student Indoctrination (NSI) as an instructor allowed me to serve as a leader for hundreds of aspiring midshipmen. Located at Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, IL (also known as Navy's only boot camp), I and several other 1/C and 2/C midshipmen, including the Black Dragon Battalion's own MIDN 2/C Kowalewski, were tasked with leading





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incoming 4/C midshipman and imbuing them with a basic military competency over four weeks. These new midshipmen, referred to as “candidates” during their time at NSI, were trained in the five warfighting fundamentals: firefighting, damage control, seamanship, watchstanding, and small arms training and marksmanship. With the help and guidance of Marine Corps Drill Instructors and Navy Recruit Division Commanders, my fellow instructors and I had the heavy responsibility of facilitating the transformation of 76 candidates from Bravo Company, 1st Platoon into unit-ready midshipmen. These candidates were shaped from civilians to disciplined young men and women, eager to head home to their college units, begin their career as midshipmen, and ultimately have the privilege of leading Marines and Sailors in a few years. Although rewarding, nothing about being an instructor at Great Lakes was easy. The days were long, the nights were late, and the mornings were early. Many of the other midshipman instructors joked that we endured a mini deployment. However, I would not change it for the world. I had the unique opportunity to gain more experience in standing watch, encounter firsthand what the enlisted sailors I will be leading in the future withstand at boot camp, and begin learning how to be an efficient and effective leader. Moreover, with the abundance of experiences and learning opportunities I was fortunate enough to come across, there was one that stood out the most: no mission is impossible to accomplish if the right people surround you. With little sleep and being on my feet for hours at a time, the midshipman to my right and left constantly motivated me and kept me moving toward the goal of transforming the candidates into midshipmen and sending them to their units. Overall, NSI was an experience I will never forget and will carry with me as I start my career as a naval officer.





## **Marine Month East** by MIDN 2/C Smith, Robert J.

For my 2/C summer cruise, I had the privilege of being part of the first wave of marine options to take on the new cruise: Marine Month East. Having never been able to go on one of these opportunities in the summer due to the COVID pandemic, I was a little nervous at first, especially with this year being the first installation of Marine Month East. However, I was thankful enough not to take on this new journey alone. I attended the cruise with a couple of fellow MIDN from Rutgers. The cruise layout made it seem like a precursor to OCS, which is the ultimate task that our NROTC careers lead up to. Upon arrival, the first few days were rather slow, as the instructors took ample time to explain how the Marine Month East was to be conducted. However, as time progressed, things started to pick up quickly. We did a lot of activities we had not yet been exposed to, such as live range shooting, Small Unit Leadership Exercises (SULEs) in the field, touring the air wing, etc. Spending time in the field, establishing a bivouac, sleeping, and pulling fire watch shifts in the intense humidity of North Carolina are events that







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no other cruise has to offer. Marine Month East also gave us MIDN the opportunity to interact with the enlisted side of the Marine Corps. Being able to speak with and gain knowledge from all ranks from PFC to MGySgt allowed us to take note of leadership traits and experience. It was solid exposure to the Marine Corps for us MIDN who have never gotten hands-on experience. It also allowed us to meet other Marine

option MIDN from across the country; we befriended people who we will see for the majority of our careers as future Marine Corps officers. Looking back on my time at Marine Month East, I have great memories and laughs from meeting hundreds of new MIDN and Marines. The

knowledge and experience I gained there has better prepared me to be an officer and a leader amongst peers and has helped in my preparation for OCS next summer.





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## **Project GO** by MIDN 2/C Ogawa, Megan

This summer, I went to The Citadel Military College in Charleston, SC for seven weeks on a Project Global Officer Domestic Program to learn Year 1 Mandarin Chinese. Available only to ROTC cadets and midshipmen, Project GO is an intensive, four-credit program fully funded by the Defense Language Initiative to increase future military officers' language skills and cultural awareness. Cadets and midshipmen can apply from all levels of language proficiency and even apply for opportunities to go abroad for the summer.

I was motivated to apply for Project GO because I plan to minor in Linguistics, and I liked the opportunity to speak with my grandparents, who only speak Chinese. While the program moved very quickly and assigned a heavy workload every day, this Project GO summer experience is hands-down the best experience I have ever had in NROTC. Aside from learning the Chinese language and multiple aspects of Chinese culture, I was able to form strong connections with other midshipmen and cadets from across the world, as well as explore Charleston, a city with very strong connections to American military history dating back to the Revolutionary War.

Living in the barracks with midshipmen and cadets from other ROTC programs, including The Citadel, it was easy to connect with other people to the point where I still maintain those connections today. This was partly due to the Project GO curriculum, where we all quickly developed an appreciation for differences in mindsets and cultural backgrounds and a sense of teamwork and camaraderie through a common goal. As we were learning Chinese during the school week, some of our weekends were spent taking trips to museums and parks, such as Fort Sumter, the Downtown Charleston area, and the Old Exchange and Provost Dungeon. Nearly all were interweaved with military history and remnants of life from the formation of America. We spent other weekends volunteering at a local farm through the Citadel Krause Center, where we learned hands-on sustainable

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practices and helped provide food for the local area. All in all, the experience of Project GO at The Citadel was a life-changing and fulfilling experience where I was able to learn and appreciate the Chinese language and culture, form strong relationships with future officers, expand my knowledge of military history, and engage with the local area around Charleston through community service.







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## **CORTRAMID East** by MIDN 3/C Freeman, Mia

After a year and a half of what was basically social isolation, every Midshipman attending CORTRAMID East 2021 did not know what to expect. I knew three other Midshipmen from Rutgers/Princeton NROTC would be joining me, MIDN Dalmass and MIDN Gilhuley in Golf Company, and MIDN Leaver in Echo Company, but they had always just been faces on Zoom calls or names in a group chat. After arriving, however, I was met with nothing but kindness from them, as well as dozens of other Midshipmen from across the country, many of whom were experiencing the same mixture of excitement, nervousness, and freedom after such a long period of abnormality. The Midshipmen in Golf Company hailed from every corner of the United States: from the various colleges in the Boston Consortium to UC Davis on the West Coast, from as far south as Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, all the way up to the University of Maine.



CORTRAMID's objective was to expose 3/C Midshipmen to the various warfare communities available to us upon commissioning into the Navy. The first week consisted of a PRT, EOD Day, Marine Day, Heritage Day, and SEAL Day. The following three weeks were divided into

Submarine Week (held in King's Bay, GA), Surface Week, and, finally, Aviation Week. No matter what these various weeks consisted of, whether it was marching with riot shields on Marine Day, flying in T-34's or helicopters, running through obstacle courses on SEAL Day, or just making it through one more brief without





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any coffee, we all learned to work together and trust one another, 24/7, day-in-day-out. Golf Company was less than a family, but more than friendship: it was a true team. The positive experiences we shared and the remarkable camaraderie we developed were memorable lessons on the value of teamwork, cohesion, and diverse personalities in the military. Many of the friendships we made with other Midshipmen from various universities are still ongoing. This month in Norfolk was an incredible beginning to our potential careers as Naval Officers.







## **Navy Birthday Celebration** by MIDN 4/C Coppola, Sara

On 13 October 2021, Rutgers/Princeton NROTC celebrated the Navy's 246th birthday. The Navy began with humble beginnings with its original six frigates. Over the course of 246 years, it has grown into the world's largest maritime fighting force comprised of a ready and resilient submarine, aviation, and surface force. The battalion gathered together for a traditional cake-cutting ceremony to celebrate this tremendous feat. The Navy is deep-rooted with tradition, and the cake-cutting ceremony is no different. Typically, the most senior and youngest sailor cut the cake at the same time. For this year's Navy birthday, the youngest Midshipman, Midshipman Aguero, and the oldest staff member, Captain Paul De Marcellus, cut the cake together. The first slice of cake is presented to the guest of honor. In this celebration, the guest of honor was Ms. Frances Ruff. Subsequently, the next slice of cake is presented to the youngest Midshipman. The third slice is then presented to the oldest midshipmen.



Following the ceremony, the battalion listened to of a birthday message from the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michael Gilday. Throughout this message, the battalion learned about John Paul Jones, the father of the American Navy, and his exceptional resilience as Naval Commander in the Revolutionary War. The birthday celebration concluded with a lesson from the active-duty staff discussing important leadership characteristics. Midshipmen were able to openly discuss what leadership meant to them and which attributes held the highest precedence. The active-duty staff shared wisdom with the Midshipmen and how it translated into the fleet. This powerful closing of the celebration allowed Midshipmen a moment to reflect and have utmost pride for the fleet they will enter in the future.





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## **VADM John Mustin Guest Speaker** by MIDN 2/C Seo,

Chungwon

Vice Admiral John Mustin, NROTC Rutgers-Princeton's Surface Warfare Officer Sponsor, paid a visit to the battalion. He started the lab by encouraging midshipmen to read the upcoming National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy changes. He emphasized the importance of knowing what future Navy and Marine officers will expect and how the nation will operate towards future conflicts. With the transition from the Global War on Terrorism to competition with near-peer powers such as China and Russia, it is necessary to understand the tactics and the way our country will handle near-future conflicts. As midshipmen work their way to become an officer, obtaining knowledge and understanding readiness expectations is as crucial as ever. For the past 20 years, the Marine Corps operated like a small army; however, the Marine Corps is expected to re-focus on being an amphibious force in the near future. To support these changes, new technologies will be implemented towards future operations for both the Navy and the Marine Corps. An example of this was the Nemesis, a small autonomous ship that carries long-distance missiles. This capability allows a small number of marines to operate quickly rather than risking a whole destroyer as they



get closer to enemy lines. Additionally, VADM Mustin explained the most important trait he expects to see in his sailors and marines: character. Having good character is setting an example by behavior and having integrity. VADM Mustin said he expects to see more character than competency. Through his visit to the battalion, MIDN earned a greater

understanding of near future conflicts, the future state of maritime services, and the quality expected of them in the Navy and Marine Corps.

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## **Military Ball Fall 2021** by MIDN 3/C Spera, Guiseppe

On Friday, November 5th, the battalion held its annual military ball at The Imperia in Somerset, NJ. Being held only a few days away from the Marine Corps birthday, the ball kicked off with the playing of "The Commandant's Birthday message," a video honoring the brave men and women who gave the ultimate sacrifice in the 246 years of the Marine Corps existence. The ball was composed of many military ceremonies, including a cake-cutting tradition where the oldest midshipman gives a piece of cake to the youngest midshipmen, signifying the passing of experience and knowledge from the old to the young of our unit. Toasts were also made to the men and women serving in the United States military and those who died fighting for our freedom.

In his opening speech, Commanding Officer Captain de Marcellus spoke on the idea of family and how proud he was that all the midshipmen in our unit genuinely want each other to succeed. He stressed the importance of bringing that comradery out into the fleet and how we must value each and every one of our sailors and marines for our division to succeed.

Included in his speech, Captain de Marcellus gave a farewell to Commander Patrick. Commander Patrick has served in the United States Navy for over 20 years and has been the Executive Officer at our unit for the past 5 years. Being at the unit for more than half of its existence, Commander Patrick has been an integral part of the battalion and is credited for turning the unit into what it is today. Captain de Marcellus presented Commander Patrick with a parting gift





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started by LT Hammerquist, the previous Lieutenant at the unit, and finished by the current staff. The gift was a wooden helm displaying challenge coins of every command that Commander Patrick served for, signifying the many years Commander Patrick has dedicated to the United States Navy.



We were very fortunate to have Chief Mason Blacker as our guest of honor. Chief Blacker is both an accomplished Navy Seal and a medical student. In his speech, Chief Blacker emphasized American Exceptionalism and was very proud to call himself an American citizen. He also talked about the idea of officer-enlisted relationships and how they are vital to achieving success on the battlefield.







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## **Turkey Bowl 2021** by MIDN 4/C Iacobucci, Giovanni

The turkey bowl exposed me to new people in two ways: literally in the sense of meeting people in Air Force and Army ROTC, as well as the fun side of the upper class midshipmen I already knew. Practice for Turkey Bowl may have been the most fun I've had in the battalion yet. I got to see the true personalities of the upperclassmen and my fellow midshipmen. I only saw these people before in contexts where the NROTC program dictated far more formal interactions, and so seeing this fun, joking side of these people made the entire NROTC program seem more like family. I got to joke about Dune with the same people that made my life



hell at NSO, and it made me very grateful for all of their advice and guidance. This program changed how I saw my fellow midshipman and exposed me to the other ROTC programs. I met a few members of these programs at practices when they stopped by, but most of all, this gave me something to talk about with members of these units. I could start a conversation with Army or Air Force ROTC members with, "You guys excited for turkey bowl?" Turkey bowl was an excellent experience, and I am very excited for it in the future. The

connection it brought between myself and those I had not been able to find common ground with before was a great feeling, and I look forward to it next year.







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## **Cornell MEC** by MIDN 4/C Aguero, Omar

When MIDN Mayes initially sent out the email about the Cornell Military Excellence Competition (MEC), a military excellence competition that brings together various NROTC units and service academies to compete in drill and athletic events, a few things stood out to me. First, CAPT de Marcellus' intention: to compete as best we can. Next, MIDN Mayes' intention: to claim some souls. And finally, the attached picture of Marengo, the famous war horse of Napoleon I of France. Although he was short for a warhorse, he was reliable and courageous: of the highest quality. A perfect comparison to us as "We are a small unit, but where we lack in quantity we make up for in quality" - MIDN Mayes. I felt immediately motivated to represent our unit, defeat other teams, and prove the quality of the battalion.

After supercharging from a restful night on the floors of Barton Hall and fueled by MREs from the night prior, it was time to get ready for the ceremony. Dressed up in our SDBs with the Star-Spangled Banner playing, a sense of pride engulfed the room that everyone could feel, and once the opening ceremony ended, we all knew it was time to perform. My first event was the 5k run around Beebe Lake. Although it was a very cold morning in Ithaca, with parts of the course slippery from the conditions, it did not deter any of us from putting out. Members of the staff and other MIDN joined together in a chorus of cheer and motivation to push us during the race, giving us the extra energy to claim our place. By the end of the race, our unit had walked away with our first victory of the day by MIDN O'Connell, an indication of what was in store for our unit.





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Back in Barton Hall, MIDN competed in Squad Drill. Led by MIDN Jones, our MIDN executed their routine and came out triumphant over all other schools, including West Point, who brought their varsity drill team from a student body of over 4,000 cadets. Later in the day, the staff had an opportunity to compete against staff members of other units. Capt Paragone and GySgt DeBord rose to the challenge and

represented the Black Dragons. Each repetition and exercise was done with the utmost technique and integrity, even when other schools did not adhere to the same standards. The 4x400m relay was thrilling to watch, and once the baton was handed to MIDN Bryan, he took off like an F-35. Something magical must've been put in his shoes that gave him an extra kick, or more likely it was his hard work and dedication from years of soccer. Dedication seems to be something that runs in the unit because MIDN Collins held his plank for what seemed like an eternity, and was more than doubling the max for the Physical Readiness Test.



Then came the final trials of the day. The swimming events had arrived, and we thrived. Both of the relays were won by our team, in large part thanks to MIDN White's windmills that he has for arms, as well as a loud whistler that kept on motivating our swimmers. After this last event, we returned to Barton Hall again





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for the closing ceremony and received our awards. I lost count of the number of times BCO MIDN Zito had to walk back and forth to receive all of our accolades. It was then time to return to Rutgers, and with such a successful day of competition, I felt prideful to have the privilege of wearing my SDBs and did not even bother to change out of them at Cornell but instead rode home in them feeling as if I was on top of the world.





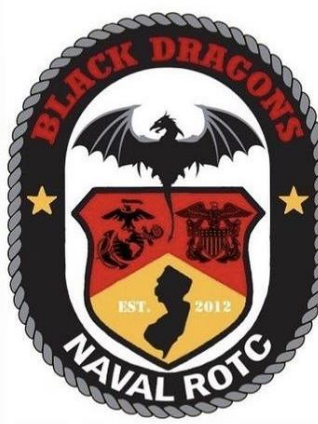
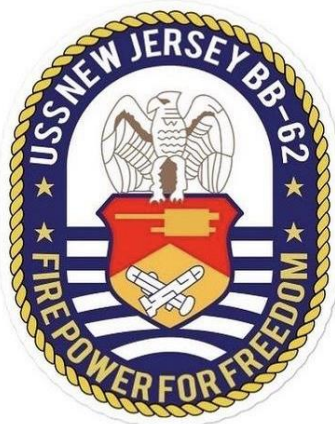
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## **Closing Remarks**

A special thank you to all the midshipmen and staff who contributed to and worked on this newsletter! To everyone, thank you for your hard work and continued support of Rutgers/Princeton NROTC. The last few semesters have been challenging for all of us, but we were lucky to be able to resume semi-normal operations this semester. For the 3/C and 4/C MIDN, this was our first semester together with the entire unit, and we are grateful for the opportunity to finally connect with our fellow midshipmen in a physical setting. We appreciate all the effort it took to get us all back together so that we can learn and grow as a unit.



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