

# NROTC Rutgers/Princeton Newsletter

SPRING 2024 ISSUE

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DRAGON  
BATTALION



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# CO Statement

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## Black Dragons,

I talk about culture a lot. It is one of the most important parts of being a leader. While you cannot control who you are going to work for or the environment you walk into, you can apply your full effort to build the camaraderie among your fellow JOs and, of course, creating a solid climate inside the confines of the Marines and Sailors under your command. That is the most satisfying aspect of leadership: knowing that you built a team that is successful because they are pros who work as a focused team, respecting and sharpening each other. As the commander, one proposes the vision, but the truth is, the commander relies on every member in the unit to execute that vision. As we discussed in the recent lab, you as future JO's have that power to effect change in the units you go to. You do so by assisting and including your peers and by promoting and pushing for events like our Mess Night or more informal social events to strengthen those bonds. But in some units I was a part of, the competitive nature tempted the JOs to be self-promoters, - happy to gossip about and castigate the "underperformers" rather than reaching out to them to help them get where they needed to be. Gravitating toward others who are like you (in any respect) is normal but unhealthy cliques destroy a unit. Behind-the-back derisions and sidelining only destroy one's own chance to see what a high-performing unit can do and establishes a personal habit pattern that will continue to poison every culture/relationship one touches.



I recently returned to Cornell to honor an NROTC friend of mine a year below me who was KIA 20 years ago in Iraq. Over half the unit, 35 of us, came back 30 years after our time together to celebrate his life. It was incredibly moving to see the closeness of the three grades below mine. My NROTC class at Cornell was wildly cliquish - only two from my class were there.

Seeing the Black Dragons get together gives me great joy and satisfaction because I see that close team. Guard that jealously - it is fragile. Always reflect on how you could do better to assist the MIDN around you and ensure they feel part of the team.

Enjoy this summer and come back safe - refreshed and recharged for another great year.





# Princeton Military Social

22 February 2024

The Princeton Military Social event was yet another instance of Princeton's regular support of its military community. Administrative figures like University President Eisgruber, Dean Calhoun, and Zinnia Yoon addressed the group of Navy, Army, and Air Force ROTC cadre, midshipmen, and staff. Leaders from each ROTC program gave an update about their battalion's success. Leaders from the Princeton Veterans Group (PVETS) also gave the group an update about their success.

The social was an excellent opportunity to speak with staff, administration, and enjoy the company of fellow ROTC students at Princeton. The event was, without doubt, a strong continuation of the annual spring dinner— which was started last year after NROTC students at Princeton suggested the idea. I, personally, enjoyed speaking with the 4/C midshipmen, LT Garrett, and a few AFROTC cadets. I described my experience and takeaways from leading NSI, and we reflected on what the next few years of ROTC might bring. The 4/C recalled some of their favorite moments during their NSI and what they hoped the unit would be like throughout their time as midshipmen. Overall, it was a wonderful event and an opportunity to interact with Princeton's military community.

# Judging a JROTC Drill Meet

24 February 2024



As a previous NJROTC cadet, I never once attended a drill competition, let alone competed in one. However, after gaining experience through competing in Military Excellence Competitions, I gained an appreciation and sense of competitiveness that these competitions hold. So, after hearing that Colts Neck and Sterling High School needed volunteer judges, I immediately volunteered. I attended Sterling High School first, and it was a great experience this semester. I was able to judge Color Guard (which is something I've never done before) and learned a lot about their specific drill movements.

I also was able to talk to a lot of cadets who were interested in the NROTC, and hopefully managed to convince them to join us! Our team had to leave early, so we weren't able to see who won, but based on what I saw and what the other midshipmen told me, a lot of schools did a fantastic job and the scoring could have been extremely close! Soon after that, I volunteered to attend the Colts Neck HS drill competition. I was excited, not because I would be able to see more talented schools, but also because my old NJROTC unit was attending as well. I was able to reconnect with my old instructors and talk to them about my current position and how they are doing. This was actually the first time I saw my old school compete, and I always knew that our school was really good, but they blew me away, to say the least. Colts Neck also paired me with other service members and we had such great conversations about the military and they gave me advice on becoming a better officer. I was able to hand out trophies at this event with the rest of the judges, and I vividly remember competing against another midshipman from Villanova, on which schools would win what trophies; a great fun memory.

Overall, the opportunity to attend these competitions and be blown away by the determination and skill levels that these freshmen to seniors have is amazing. It's just a great experience that I believe many other midshipmen can use to learn from and see the dedication that the newer generations have.





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# Battle of Trenton & Princeton Battle Site Tour

29 March 2024

Hiking 12 miles during Friday training was a journey. With each step from the Washington Crossing Statue to the Princeton Battlefield, the weight of the pack pressing down, it was one of those things that I would remember for a lifetime! Reaching the finish line brought an incredible sense of accomplishment, being able to say I walked the same path as George Washington and his troops is incredible. This hike wasn't just about making it to the other side but realizing the importance of what George Washington and his troops did. Without them making their mark, leading the way no matter the conditions during the foundation of America, America wouldn't be the country it is today and I think it's so significant that we were able to reflect on that. This experience also allowed the other MIDN and me to bond, getting down in the dirt and learning different fighting skills, showed me how much I have to learn. Overall I'm very grateful for this experience and still in awe that I had the chance to take part in it!





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# Mess Night

22 March 2024



"What happens if someone forgets to..." is practically the initiation question for us new midshipmen, a rite of passage into the world of naval tradition and camaraderie. However, among the slew of responses to the question, one stood out, imparting a mix of fear and intrigue: "Oh, you'll see at mess night." And boy, did I see. Mess night was a theater of absurdity, where everyone, from seasoned staff members to brand new midshipmen, had their moment to reflect on the semester and "fine" each other for their "crimes" (trivial mishaps and slip-ups). While the legitimacy of these "crimes" was questionable, the fines handed out were anything but forgettable. From ruck marches to shoe swaps and an 8-point cover large enough to rival something out of "Spaceballs," everyone had a good laugh. But beyond the theatrical fines and laughter, mess night celebrated tradition and honor.

We were privileged to host Major Donald Moore (USMC, Ret.) as our esteemed guest, who shared inspiring words about fulfillment as a leader and service to one's community. His speech invigorated the unit with an optimistic vision, reminding us why we chose this path and what lies ahead.

As I look back on that evening, I'm struck by the palpable sense of presence in the room, a rarity in a world where plans are meticulously laid out for years at a time. Moments like these, where we gather to break bread and share stories, remind us of the importance of cherishing the present and the people who make it unique. It's not just a part of Navy and Marine Corps culture; it's a testament to the bonds that unite us.



# Yale Leadership Conference

5-7 April 2024

The 2024 Leadership & Strategy Conference, hosted by the Yale NROTC Undergraduate Association, brought together a host of speakers, domestic and international officers, and a wide range of ROTC cadets, midshipmen, and military college students to learn about critical events around the world.

One of the most striking lectures for me was the talk on The Ukraine War and its implications for the world, discussed by professors Michael Brenes, Arne Westad, and Timothy Snyder. The Ukrainian War has brought the NATO alliance closer together, reduced Russia's military capacity, and reminded the world that freedom is not a guarantee for all, but is worth fighting for even against overwhelming odds.

Rear Admiral Tim Woods from the United Kingdom and Rear Admiral Ian Murray from Australia met with Rear Admiral Heidi Berg to discuss the future of the AUKUS agreement and the cooperation between the three countries. With the AUKUS agreement, the United States plans to expand the capacity of nuclear submarines within its trusted alliance. The United States will grant Australia access to US nuclear submarine technology to bolster Australia's military presence in the Pacific, while also opening up Australian ports for repairs on American submarines, allowing us to keep and maintain US submarines in the region.



Alongside fascinating lectures, cadets and midshipmen were able to converse with one another and share stories of their experiences in ROTC and the academies, bonding over their experiences of NSI or plebe summer, and discussing differences in the types of leadership across ROTC programs and the military academies. The US military offers a wide variety of ways to enter the service, from Officer Candidate School, the military academies, and ROTC programs. It was interesting to hear about the different ideologies and methods the differing programs used in order to achieve the common goal of creating US officers.

Overall, the Yale Leadership Conference was an insightful experience in which Rutgers and Princeton midshipmen were able to learn from a fascinating array of professors, US admirals, and admirals from the United Kingdom and Australia, as well as build connections with students from across the nation.



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# April FEX

12-14 April 2024

To end the semester, our Marine Option Midshipman embarked on a three-day Field Exercise (FEX) to prepare them for the rigors of OCS. The FEX, hosted at joint base Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, began with a fast-paced 65-pound 9-mile hike to the bivouac site. Not a single MIDN dropped out, even as 2 LT Denton pushed the pace to challenge our MIDN. Following the hike, MIDN received classes on self/buddy aid and night land navigation.

Saturday brought even more challenges for our Marine option MIDN. With a 0600 reville, MIDN quickly embarked on the endurance course, where two squads competed against each other—MIDN quickly learned that it pays to be a winner. Later, MIDN conducted 6 hours of Small Unit Leadership Evaluations (SULEs), an event that is graded and pertinent to the success of MIDN at Officer Candidate School (OCS). Our Juniors who embark on OCS in the coming weeks got 2 repetitions each, ensuring that they're prepared for the rigors that lay ahead. MIDN ended the day with a night land navigation course, using only their compass, map, and the light of the moon to guide themselves to certain points properly.

The FEX was a challenging and rewarding experience for all MIDN and staff involved. The training received is sure to benefit not only our OCS-bound Midshipman but our underclassmen, who will soon assume the role of leadership that was bestowed upon the MIDN above them.





# April FEX Shots





# Villanova MEC

22 April 2024



The annual Military Excellence Competition, held at Villanova University, hosted ROTC units from across the East Coast, allowing midshipmen to showcase their physical fitness and military aptitude. For the Rutgers/Princeton battalion, the MEC was a resounding success! The battalion clinched gold in the Endurance Course, a grueling test of physical and mental stamina, thanks to the exceptional performances of MIDN Collins, MIDN White, MIDN Walsh, and MIDN Imperial.

Adding to the triumph, MIDN Ryan and MIDN Casano-Boris outpaced all competitors in the MURPH and 5k events respectively, both taking home first place. MIDN Johnson also finished on the podium for the male 5k, showing he's still got pace in those legs!

Despite the odds, Rutgers/Princeton made it to the finals tug of war, regrettably falling second to a Villanova team comprised of all MECEPS. The effort and spirit they demonstrated were admirable, and they should be proud of their valiant efforts. The squad drill and color guard teams also had a chance to shine, displaying their precise movements and sharp coordination which reflected their months of rigorous training and discipline.



Beyond the competitions, the event was a great opportunity for bonding among the midshipmen. Students from all schools had the opportunity to interact with one another, sharing a sense of mutual respect that exceeded the competitive nature of the events. This year's MEC at Villanova University was indeed a great day for all involved, filled with memorable moments of achievement and camaraderie.



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# May Senior Dining In

30 May 2024

On the evening of Tuesday, April 30th, the Black Dragons celebrated their annual Senior Dining-In at Seasons 52. Each spring, the unit hosts a semiformal dinner for all staff members, MECEPs, and 1/C Midshipmen. Leading up to the event, the eight seniors casted their votes in three categories: Most Inspirational Staff Member, Most Inspirational MECEP, and Most Inspirational 1/C Classmate.

The floor was opened for speeches from everyone present, and the first were given by the voted winners of each category, accepting the honor of being so highly regarded by the senior class.

As multiple courses of food came and went, the night was increasingly steeped in nostalgia. Staff members and MECEPs rose to reflect on moments with the 1/Cs from their underclassmen years, and multiple Midshipmen shared anecdotes, both commemorating mentors and digging up old memories from their eventful four years. The relatively informal setting was ideal, allowing the remarkably small senior class to bond and socialize with one another and with the staff.

Overall, the Senior Dining-In is an opportunity for reflection, celebration, and sentimentality that all underclassmen should look forward to

## Voted Winners

Most Inspirational Staff Member: Capt Paragone

Most Inspirational MECEP: Gysgt Sandoval

Most Inspirational Classmate: MIDN White



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# May Commissioning Ceremony

13 May 2024

Commissioning this year felt different knowing mine was only a year off, and watching some of my closest friends commission was a bittersweet experience. Due to covid, all of the classes of 2024 and 2025 went to NSO together down at fort dix, from my first experience in NROTC I had these men and women with me, and then realizing that my time with them by my side was over hurt. But I was so proud knowing how much all of them had accomplished and endured to get to where they are now.

The five officers that were commissioned in May of 2024 will all be assets to the fleet, spread out wildly across the communities. Surface warfare took two of the five, submarines took one, cryptography another, and Marine Corps the fifth.

Their commissioning ceremony saw speeches from three powerful speakers, Rutgers President Holloway, Seal Commander Pinkston, and our own Skipper Captain De Marcellus. Their powerful words gave me hope for the future of the country and our shared future careers in the fleet. I am very proud of those Rutgers sent into the fleet this year, and cannot wait to see all they accomplish.





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# Closing Remarks

May 2024

As the school year came to an end, another great chapter for the Rutgers-Princeton NROTC Unit went down in the books. The year was filled with successful fundraising, exceptional volunteering opportunities, a strengthened commitment to service from all, and a notable and everlasting sense of community. I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to writing an article and aided in its completion. As the seniors we know and love entered their newly discovered path as commissioned officers, their leadership and admirable qualities will live on within the unit. As our staff shifts and we welcome the new incoming class of 4/Cs, we are reminded of the importance of teaching and mentorship. The opportunities given to each midshipmen in this unit will stay with us forever with the guarantee that our strong leadership and morals will help act as our guiding light. With that, thank you to our incredible staff and motivated midshipmen! Keep up the good work and never forget to embrace challenges.

