

A Summer in Review (Continued)

I will highlight three things that I hope will paint an incomplete picture of my experience. First, R-Day was intense, hectic, emotional, and exhausting. Before the swabs arrived, I was totally freaking out inside. Deep down I knew I was ready, but I still had no idea what was coming. I was lucky enough to be chosen to give the infamous quad speech for my company (Echo). I had written and memorized the opening speech and was practicing it over and over again in my head right up until the bus arrived, and I couldn't remember everything. However, the minute I busted out of Chase Hall into the quad, I was ready. I delivered the speech and we were underway. The rest of the day is a blur. We introduced ourselves and taught them bare minimums of what we expected them to do. We ferried them from issue to issue and training to training. In the midst of all that, I had to teach them how to march for the swearing-in ceremony. The swabs were scared and nervous, but the cadre were just as on edge. In the end, the swearing in ceremony went great, and the day wound down to a close. Everyone was emotionally spent, and we retired to for the night at about 1230, only to wake up a few minutes before 0530 to do it all over again.

The second experience I had is not one day; rather, it was teaching drill. I volunteered for that collateral duty before the summer began, and I read and memorized manuals and movements to prepare. Teaching drill is totally different than doing it. I had to break down each movement, properly demonstrate it, and help the swabs to do it on their own. It was a tough task, and it didn't always work the first time, but I stayed patient, and I did my best to teach the swabs how to look good marching on the parade field. I would always remind them that if they weren't together in a movement or marching, they were just a bunch of individuals wearing the same uniform and trying to look the same. I instilled pride in the tradition of drill and pride in looking good. I followed that up with always attempting to lead the section marching them from training to training and trying to get them to march as a unit. My efforts were not in vain. Though the swabs weren't very good at drill when I left, that pride remained, and with practice they became one of the better sections in the corps.

The third experience I had was at the end of my time with the swabs. In the mid year culminating event, the long blue climb, Echo Company was able to showcase their abilities as a team. They were challenged physically and mentally at several stations all over campus. Each station had a physical and indoctrination element, and Echo did awesome. They encouraged each other, supported each other, and bonded as a unit like never before. We encouraged them as well, and we rooted them on and did all the physical workouts with them as they pushed forward. At the very end, we stood atop library hill, and I was proud. I was proud of Echo as a team and as a company. They represented themselves outstandingly, and we got

third in the long blue climb. On the next day, we had a cadre switch, and I was filled with emotion as I looked at my swabs for the last time that summer. They had made me proud.

Looking back at my cadre experience, I accomplished my goals. I was a teacher. I respected the swabs. I trained them and indoctrinated them. Most importantly, I instilled a sense of pride in them for the Coast Guard. Pride was the most effective training tool I had. Instead of being feared by yelling and making the swabs succeed, I tried to make them want to succeed for the sake of pride, in themselves, as a team, and in the Coast Guard. In addition to that, yelling at the swabs loses its effectiveness after about a week and a half, so we moved onto physical discipline. After about two weeks physical discipline loses its effectiveness. All that is left is motivation from something, and for me it was pride. Yelling and discipline get to be predictable. The swabs know when it is coming because they get used to the routine of the day, which results in some sense of comfort. Real leadership involves figuring out different ways to keep the swabs guessing as to what is coming next. I won't say that our section did that to perfection, but we certainly broke from the tradition of constant yelling and physical punishment, which is the norm. Part of that is due to changes in our standard operating procedure, which outlines what we can do as cadre and so on, another part of it is due to the combined effort, dedication, creativeness, and teamwork of the cadre.

My next summer training was Coastal Sail, which was awesome. However, I think I will save that for next time, because it was so eye opening and fun. After that I went on leave and participated in a program called Rocky Mountain High in Colorado, but I will again save that for another blog. After that I went on leave for a week, before returning to the Academy. During leave, I reflected a lot on the summer, and that is where all of this insight on my summer comes from. I learned a lot about it after the fact. Also, I thought a lot about my impending surgery. I was not afraid of it, because I had a great surgeon, and I had support from my faith, friends, and family.

When I returned to the Academy, I had the pleasure of seeing all my friends and swabs. Then, I went in for surgery. The whole thing went great, and I look forward to a speedy recovery, but what is more interesting to me is what was going on back at the Academy. In the afternoon, the swabs had the shoulder board ceremony, which is the official end to swab summer and the transformation into 4/c cadets. I learned later on that many of the swabs had actually missed me, and had wanted me to be there to put on their shoulder boards. Also, they did great in the drill that accompanies the ceremony, and they wished I had been there to see it. I was overcome with pride hearing that. A few days later, I even had a 4/c walk into my room and thank me for instilling that pride in the Coast Guard for them. That was the best feeling I can remember. I felt fulfilled because I accomplished my goals, and I was proud of my 4/c.

That was my cadre experience. I cannot speak for all of the other cadre, but I thought it was one of the greatest experiences I have ever had. I'm sorry to have written so much, but I am passionate about what we did here over the summer. I hope I have showed enough about what the summer is like from a cadre's perspective so that people can more appreciate what we do.

If you have any questions at all about Swab Summer or the cadre experience, please email me at Hunter.D.Stowes@uscga.edu. I look forward to hearing from you, and I am excited to get another blog out about what I learned from the last part of my summer.