

Summer 2015 – Week by Week (Continued)

American Service Academy Fellowship: New York, Washington D.C., Poland, Slovakia

0645: I carry four sea bags—one on my back, one in front, and two in my hands. I trek from Chase to the front gate, up early enough to see the Assistant Superintendent, CAPT Vogt, walk to Hamilton Hall to start his day. 2/c Eva Sandri pulls up at the front gate, and I load the bags into the car. We board a train to Washington, D.C., and I quickly fall asleep. I wake up in Washington, soon finding ourselves lost in the D.C. metro. We check into the hotel, and meet the coordinator of the program. I am here to study the holocaust, ethical dilemmas that face military officers, and to make preparations to travel to Poland in the next few days. After meeting up with cadets from USAFA, USMA, and USNA, we go through briefs and academic discussions at the National Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., and then make our way to the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City. Finally, we board a Lufthansa flight to Krakow, Poland with a layover in Germany. While in Poland, we continue our academic discussions, tour the Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau II concentration camps, and study the implications of unlawful orders, the holocaust, and the relationship to genocide today. Quite an emotional experience, but soon, the program ends. I am left with many thoughts, experiences, and friendships with cadets and midshipmen around the country.

Leave: Poland, the Netherlands, France, United Kingdom, and Iceland

Poland

1200: Everyone has left Krakow now, and I am the last cadet in the city. I am alone, or at least I haven't interacted with an American in a few days. Somehow I make it to the airport in Krakow 40 miles from my hotel—which is small, sweaty, and reminiscent of Soviet Europe. I board the plane, again, and land in Amsterdam, Holland.

Holland

As I land, I read the first English sign that I have seen in days, and breathe a sigh of relief. Amsterdam is jumping and it feels like a giant party. Strange smells, funny outfits, narrow streets, and colorful currency abound during my first night in Amsterdam. Not my kind of city, personally, but the atmosphere is jovial and carefree. The next morning, I pay a visit to the Rijksmuseum, which is the national Dutch museum (much like our Smithsonian), and I make a stop at the Van Gough museum. I pay too much for a sandwich in a local café, and then pack my bags for Paris.

France

1030 next day: I arrive in Paris via high speed train. Paris is much different than Amsterdam—clean streets, higher buildings, more modern, no canals. Too many museums to visit in one day, I think, so I choose a few things to do. I see the city from a bird's eye view on the Arc de Triomphe, visit the Eiffel Tower, and spend a day at King Louis XIV's infamous palace, Versailles. On the train to Versailles, a man with an accordion plays for change and he's quite good so I throw in a few Euros. An intersection of history, the palace is the largest in the Western World. I am overwhelmed at the amount of gold trim, high ceilings, and sheer opulence. I visit the Hall of Mirrors, where French kings held their court since around 1600, and where the modern German state was created in the 1870s. One grand hallway is adorned with massive paintings that chronicle the history of France. I am surprised to see portraits and scenes with George Washington in France, but with our French Allies such as General Marquis de Lafayette portrayed as the central figure, not Washington.

United Kingdom

Queasy from the long train ride from Paris to London, I check into my hotel. London is expensive, and the food isn't that great. I see the major sights—Big Ben and Parliament, the Eye of London, and Buckingham Palace. The real highlight is the ride to Stonehenge, one of the most mysterious constructs of the ancient world. Thousands of years old, it still stands. I am surprised at how commercialized it is, as there is a large visitors center and a fleet of tour busses surrounding it. It seems like the only point of interest on the expanse English countryside surrounding it.

Land of the Midnight Sun: Iceland

2100: I landed in Reykjavík a few hours ago, and took a long cab ride from the airport into the city, and the sun is still up. The landscape looks Martian—many rocks, volcanoes, a gray landscape, not much shrubbery but only some moss. As we approach the cityscape, it reminds me of something out of an Ikea magazine. The buildings are small, sleek, and presumably well insulated. I try some local "Viking food", of which chilled smoked meat is a staple. Taking the elevator up to the highest point in the area, a cathedral known as the Hallgrímskirkja, I look upon the skyline of the city which is surrounded entirely by mountains, the North Atlantic, and volcanoes. An organist is preparing for a recital, and the sounds are unforgettable. Bach's organ music comes to life as it bounces off of the plain white walls of the

massive interior. Buying a wool sweater and going on a few runs takes up most of my time in Iceland. Soon it is time to catch a flight to New York City.

Swab Summer: New London, Connecticut

After paying too much money for a haircut in New York City, I hop a train back to my Alma Mater. Uniform inspection the next morning, followed by a PFE, PowerPoints, and more briefs take up the week. Soon it's Monday, and the Hotel swabs roll up in the new quadrangle. It's R-Day and the Academy lets out a collective roar as 2019 hits the ground rolling. I could write a book about Swab Summer, both as a cadre and as a swab two years ago. But to keep it simple, I learned that the best way to lead isn't by yelling, (which I quickly found out), it's by taking a vested interest in your people and empowering them to succeed. With my voice nearly gone, I had to adapt. Swab Summer was a real challenge, and really an exercise in self-discovery. I quickly found out that loud does not equal lead, and that I couldn't fix the discrepancies within the company by myself as just one cadre, even though I tried to, many times. It took all of my classmates, the officers and chiefs, and all Academy personnel to challenge the best swabs and help those struggling make it through the summer. I thought swab summer was going to be easy as a cadre, and I didn't expect to make mistakes but I sure made some! I learned from my mistakes, and learned much about who I am as a leader; both what to do and what not to do. I learned that I am definitely a guy who leads from the heart, with my mind there to keep my heart in check. Soon, cadre 2 took charge, and my voice slowly recovered in the weeks ahead.

Rules of the Road & Training Boats: New London, Connecticut

Every Coast Guard officer is required to pass Rules of the Road, or the Deck Watch Officer's Exam before they graduate. The test is 50 questions, and you need to get 45 correct to pass! It covers maritime signals, lights, regulations, and minutiae of sailing rules. I don't remember much from this week, except that I surprisingly passed on my first try after late nights with the navigation rules book open.

The next week, with ROTR behind us, we took charge of the Academy training boats, learning the basics of ship handling. These old army cargo vessels were revamped in recent years, and a Coast Guard racing stripe adorns their hulls. Known to cadets as bumper boats, we sailed around the Thames River dodging buoys and other traffic to apply what we learned in ROTR to real life ship driving. This was one of my favorite weeks of the summer, and was a personal validation of what I thought I wanted to do in the Coast Guard: drive boats, of course. For one afternoon, we anchored near downtown New London and

took a swim call in the salty Thames. Soon t-boats were over and my cadre section got ready for the Coastal Sail Training Program.

Coastal Sail Training Program: Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Newport, Jamestown, Cuttyhunk, Hyannis, Stonington, New London

Tuesday 0730: Walk down to waterfront to load stores aboard the sailing vessel *Osprey*. Assigned to an all-male crew, there are six of us and one Lieutenant assigned as our safety officer. Coastal sail training program (CSTP) was more challenging than I thought—as my crew can tell you, I'm not the best managing the helm on a sailboat. But besides learning about sailing, we spent time learning about and discussing what it means to be a peer leader, that is, a leader amongst your peers. Telling your friends what to do is tough, and so is finding that balance between being someone's friend and being a professional mariner together where safety comes first. In rough weather, we were losing our breakfasts over the lee rail, but we managed to get to our assigned ports with time to spare, every day. To be cliché, sailing is like life—sometimes there is wind in your sails, and sometimes there isn't, but you have to keep trying to point your nose in the right direction to get there. CSTP was surprisingly stressful at times, but at other times it was the most relaxing time of the summer experience. The port calls were places I probably may never visit again—Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. We brought the modesty of cadet pay to the doorsteps of the likes of America's high society...and most of us came back to New London with empty wallets and shopping bags filled with suave civilian clothes!

School Begins: New London, Connecticut

2100, Sunday Night: After CSTP, I spent the weekend packing into my new room (with air conditioning!). Friends slowly trickled back into Chase, and we caught up from our very different summers. I saw my swabs again, and they were no longer swabs—their hair was longer, they stood a little taller, and they were full cadets. Looking back on a great summer, I'm excited to start the new semester and finally take some electives in the Management department. I have a good feeling about this year as Alma Mater blares after formation on Sunday night.