

Subject: [gray-matter] Beast Barracks for the Class of 2011
July 19, 2007

As the eight companies of new cadets of the Class of 2011 marched to the mess hall from the Oath Ceremony at Battle Monument shortly after 6 p.m. on 2 July 2007, they began a 47-month odyssey that, for most, will culminate in graduation on 28 May 2011 and a commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Now they are almost at the halfway point of Beast Barracks, the first leg of that journey. Required to turn in all of their modern technology on R Day, the fledgling cadets were permitted to make their first phone call home during the weekend of 7-8 July. Outfitted in their new Army camouflaged field uniforms, they also enjoyed the traditional Independence Day USMA Band Concert (but on the 7th instead of the 4th), with the posting of the flags of each state and a fireworks display. This coming weekend, they will be permitted to make their second phone call (and enjoy an ice cream social) on Sunday afternoon. On the weekend of 4-6 August, they will get their third phone call. During Reorganization Week, 13-19 August 2007, they will cease to be Luddites and will have their personal phones returned to them. Upon receipt of their laptops, during that same week, they also will have access to email and the internet, but only on their cadet-issue personal computer.

In the meantime, however, they spent their first week taking physical training every morning from 5:30 to 7:00 a.m., drawing equipment, being fitted for uniforms, learning more advanced drill and ceremonies, and being tested formally, both academically and physically. By the way, reveille formation, in PT uniform, is at 5:30 a.m., breakfast is 7:30, lunch is 1:00 p.m., dinner is 6:00, and 10:00 p.m. is Taps. During the second week, morning physical training continued, supplemented by first aid and military customs training plus a short, 3-mile, introductory road march and the Warrior Competition, a type of field day involving logs, wall obstacles, runs and similar events to determine the physically best squads in Beast Barracks. This week, they continued physical training, including the ever-popular grass drills and rifle PT, added close quarters combatives and the bayonet assault course, took a 6-mile conditioning road march with pack and weapon, and participated in a four-mile run for Regimental Day, which marks the changing of the upper class Beast detail. Organized athletics take place most afternoons, while 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. is reserved for evening classes and an occasional guest lecturer. Needless to say, training in the Honor Code and respect for others is ongoing.

What lies ahead (besides that Sunday ice cream social)? Next week, the new cadets get to enjoy the gas chamber exercise: "Hold your breath, unmask, and state your full name and new cadet company. Then you may walk, not run, out of my gas chamber!" Introduction to land navigation and mountaineering (at the mountaineering site out past Camp Natural Bridge) come next, followed by a 10-mile road march. Mole skin, anyone? Week five brings basic rifle marksmanship, zeroing of weapons, familiarization firing and qualification firing; hand grenade training (including live grenades); a buddy-team live fire exercise; and the Army Physical Fitness Test for record (4-5 August). The minimum standards are: 47 bent leg sit ups in two minutes for both men and women; 35 push ups in two minutes for men and 17 for women; and a two-mile run in 16:36 for men and 19:42 for women. Needless to say, the minimum standards are far below the new cadet average score. Week six brings an encampment out a Camp Buckner for Operation Warrior Forge, a field training exercise based somewhat on our current operations in the Middle East and involving patrolling, checkpoints, and convoys. Force on force patrolling exercises; advanced land navigation; and squad competition in both drill and ceremonies and on the Leaders' Reaction Course complete the week. Then there is the final 12-mile trail march back on the morning of 13 August. Joining them will be 150 "old grads," including a number from the 50-Year Affiliate Class of 1961. Although some new cadets drop out early for medical or psychological reasons, all are expected to complete the six-and-a-half week Beast Barracks experience before being given the option of resigning. As one former new cadet from the Class of 2010 so eloquently phrased it, "I learned more about myself, the Army, and life in one summer than I had in the first 18 years of my life." The first opportunity for new cadets to visit with parents, family and friends is after the Acceptance Day parade on 18 August. Your West Point Association of Graduates will host a picnic for parents and friends after the parade, offering light refreshments until their sons and daughters are released from barracks on "Privileges, Walking." By that time on the afternoon of 18 August 2007, the Class of 2011 no longer will be new cadets but full-fledged members of the United States Corps of Cadets and authorized one overnight pass per semester.

In response to several questions from members of the Class of 1961, the following is provided: For the next 47 months, the members of the Class of 2011 will draw \$864.30 per month, \$141.62 of which immediately is deducted for taxes, SGLI, social security and such. By contrast, cadet pay back in 1957 was \$111.15 per month, with the bulk of it placed into a "fixed" account for uniforms, books, slide rules, and such, while the remainder was placed into a

“regular” account for discretionary expenditures. Plebes were not authorized overnight passes at all—or radios or phonographs during the first semester (except during Plebe Christmas) and definitely not authorized Christmas and Spring Leave.

Just a reminder, Plebe Parent Weekend (the current equivalent of the Plebe Christmas of 50 years ago) is 11-14 October 2007.

Your humble servant, J. Phoenix, Esquire

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