

Pride, not pain pushes cadets

ROTC from page 1

While that attitude prevails within ROTC, much of the outside world perceives ROTC as a strict program of military indoctrination — a book-bag boot camp. Some believe that the minute students walk through the doors of the Military and Naval Science Building, they must sign their lives away to four years of hard labor and polishing Memorial Stadium bathrooms with a toothbrush.

"If you screw up, you'll be doing push-ups and sit-ups for the rest of your life with people in your face waiting for you to screw up," said junior Cadet Logan Veath.

"That's just not true."

But it may be true that the perception is causing a drop in enrollment, say some cadets and the officers in charge of administering the program.

Nationwide, 33,705 cadets enrolled this year, which is less than half of the 73,963 cadets enrolled in 1971. The Army counts on ROTC to produce 70 percent of its officers.

According to Cadet Command in Fort Monroe, Va., national statistics show that the smaller ROTC classes are still meeting the demands of a smaller Army. But the demand at UNL calls for 100 cadets. The 65-member Big Red Battalion is missing a few good men and women.

Part of the shortage may be because the UNL freshman class is 500 students fewer than last year; but the cadets and cadre say ignorance and misinformation also may be to blame for not enough students joining the program.

Lt. Col. Rik Barrera said some people, including professors, use the cadets as targets for their views on the military when they don't know the real skills being taught in the program.

"Once a week they see people walking around in uniforms," he said. "They think we just teach them to shoot weapons."

While cadets do run around campus before sunrise and wear their uniforms once a week, they aren't casting extras for "Full Metal Jacket." Cadets are being trained to be Army officers, but they are college students first.

Students don't major in ROTC. No degree means no commission.

Army 101

At UNL, cadets spend an average of six hours a week in combined physical training, classes and labs. They also attend field-training exercises and formal events throughout the year. Cadets must maintain a 2.0 GPA in overall course work and a 3.0 GPA in ROTC classes.

And signing up for an ROTC class is the same as registering for English 101. Students are welcome to give it a try for a while without obligation.

Joining Army ROTC is not like enlisting in the regular Army, where you're shipped off to basic training for a few weeks to become a soldier. ROTC spends years training cadets to join the Army's higher-ranking contingent of skilled officers; hence, the Reserve Officer Training Corp.

The motivation for their training isn't the bullet-voiced drill sergeant shouting ATTENTION!

It's leadership.

And for many students, it's also a full-tuition scholarship or guaranteed job after graduation or both.

It's that package of incentives that Maj. Greg Dibella, one of the program's recruitment officers, has to pull together. Dibella, indistinguishable from any university professor in his casual Big Red Battalion red polo shirt, starts the recruitment push in the spring by targeting current freshman and sophomore college students and high school seniors.

"We try to say we're not recruiters. We're all

assistant professors here," he said. "We're not required to bring people in, sign them up and ship them out somewhere."

Career days and invitations for guest speakers can give Army ROTC recruiters a chance to answer questions that might clear up the perceptions — often caused by regular Army recruiters pushing for students to join the enlisted ranks.

Junior Cadet Patrick Sitter said, "For freshmen coming in here, it's like joining a sport. Except here, you're not going to be redshirted. You'll be involved. You're not going to be the 'new guy.' You're going to travel. You're going to have help with your studies."

You're going to have fun. The curriculum for first- and second-year cadets is filled with activities like rappelling, playing paintball and challenging a ropes course. Those skills are combined with what the cadets learn in class. They are then tested during field-training exercises where they can get a taste of the Army — even when it's about as tasty as an MRE.

During the simulated-combat weekend in the forest, those brown food packs stamped with the generic "Meal Ready-to-Eat" block-lettered label were good enough for senior Cadet Dawn Lenz. She ripped open her MRE and reviewed the contents, usually something mysterious in a smaller brown pouch.

"Cheese and crackers, anyone?"

She ate while waiting for the formation of younger cadets to come over the hill. She said the weekend's exercises are really to train the MS IIIs, who are cadets usually in their third, or junior year. They are preparing for next summer's Advance Camp in Ft. Lewis, Wash., where the points they earn there are totaled with their GPA and ROTC points to determine what assignment they will have as commissioned officers after graduation.

The MS IVs, or seniors like Lenz, plan the weekend and are there to supervise, along with the officer instructors. The MS IIs and MS Is are there to watch, and maybe pick up a few things.

"They aren't in the leadership mode," she said. "It's fly by the seat of their pants."

"It's teaching as you go. There's a lot of learning, and this is the best place to learn. We're here to mentor, and head them on the right path."

And a big part of learning, Lenz said, "is screwing up."

"Sometimes you think you know everything. Then when you're in a leadership role, you realize you have to improve."

A little green

Over the course of four missions for each cadet squad, the cadets will have a chance to prove that improvement.

After junior Cadet Albert Salinas finished leading his squad's first mission, he wasn't too happy that his attempt wasn't a total success. "I can't think of any (strengths), sir," he told Capt. Scott Danner. "I think I botched the whole thing."

Danner didn't skimp on positive reinforcement.

"Guys, this is very difficult the first time," he said. "You guys did a super job."

Expecting the cadets to come out of seven weeks of training in classrooms and labs, and expecting their mission to be seamless, is like "talking about professional football for five weeks, bringing in the Dallas Cowboys and expecting to go up against them."

Danner passed out Jolly Rancher candies to all the cadets and sent them off on their next mission.

Willbanks takes charge. He orders his fellow cadets to drink enough water. Instruction as simple as that to as difficult as plotting an attack all require leadership — the ability to persuade peo-



ple to follow your directions.

Troy Wayman, one of the MS IVs helping the squad, said one of the first tenets of leadership is making a decision.

"Any decision is a good decision," he said. "We can teach you the right decision later."

That type of decision making can be applied to ROTC in general. Students can decide to simply sign up for military science classes and give ROTC a try without committing. Only later, usually in their second year, do they need to determine if that's the right decision. If they do decide to sign for an obligation to military service, and then graduate, they will be commissioned as 2nd lieutenants in the U.S. Army.

Many cadets make that obligation to get an ROTC scholarship. The \$253 million program is one of the largest scholarship-granting agencies in the country, Dibella said, and each student who qualifies is almost guaranteed a four-year, three-year or two-year scholarship worth \$5,000 to \$25,000 depending on the cost of the school he wants to attend. ROTC operates across the nation at 255 colleges and universities, both public and private, with 15 cross-enrollment programs.

At UNL, almost half the cadets are on ROTC scholarships. They even set a record for four-year scholarships this year, and brought in \$70,500 in tuition and fees overall.

Herb Howe, associate to the chancellor and the UNL administrator overseeing the ROTC program, said the ROTC program benefits the university by bringing in scholarships. And the

scholarships can make the programs competitive in bringing in the top candidates.

As the professor of military science, Barrera's definition of an ideal ROTC candidate is someone who is between the "4.0 brainiac" and "super jock." Someone like a student athlete perhaps, who realizes the brain also needs to exercise.

While Barrera cautioned that the ROTC scholarships should not be seen as a financial means to an end, for Cadet Jill Backes, that money was the best recruiter the Army could have sent. She was facing out-of-state tuition and needed a way to put herself through college.

While Backes does get a good education out of the program, she doesn't see the money as the only benefit of ROTC. She said her leadership and management skills also can be applied to a career in corporate America, or anywhere else she chooses to work. It won't be full-time Army, though.

Instead, Backes will follow the 1,378 cadets who joined the Army Reserves or National Guard last year. For eight years, Backes is obligated to spend one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer with her Reserves unit as she pursues a career combining psychology and criminal justice.

About 2,320 cadets chose to go active duty, which means they are required to serve four years full time with the regular Army. After that point, they can take a job in the private sector, or they can pursue an Army career in infantry, armor, military intelligence, ordnance or any on-

Photos by Sandy Summers