

Hensler undergoes rigorous ROTC training

Contributed by Rich Lamance
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MAXWELL AFB, Ala. — For most college students taking the summer off between their sophomore and junior years, life is usually filled with a summer job, time at the beach or a little extra time in front of their favorite video game.

For the son and stepson of a Lakeport couple, this summer is quite a bit more strenuous.

Kohl V. Hensler, son of Janell and stepson of Bill Beedle of Lakeport, is an Air Force ROTC cadet who went through a boot camp of sorts, during a more than three-week physical and mental challenge designed to prepare more than 2,300 cadets nationwide for eventual commissioning as a second lieutenant.

This is the first year that cadets have converged to one single location for their training, with the most sweeping changes to the program in more than 60 years.

For Hensler, it's the toughest challenge he'll face during his ROTC stint.

“One of the toughest parts of the training involves being thrown into a flight with 20 other individuals and being expected to lead them. While physically demanding, the training isn't as bad as I thought,” said Hensler, a 2006 graduate of Clear Lake High School in Lakeport.

The ROTC field training course is divided into three phases: The first 11 days of the training is primarily devoted to classroom work, focusing on leadership, marching and problem-solving scenarios.

Each group of about 350 cadets then moves into a more intense, six-day training at the “Blue Thunder” camp, a tent city set up at Maxwell. There, the cadets learn hand-to-hand combat, land navigation, tactical communication, face leadership reaction obstacles and qualify at the small arms range on the 9 mm pistol.

For the first time, cadets will wrap up their training with a six-day exercise at the Joint Forces Training Center at Hattiesburg, Miss., in an environment that gives them a safe look at what they might face if deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Reacting to roadside bombs, conducting convoy operations, learning small arms tactics and getting their first look at urban warfare situations are some of the challenges awaiting these cadets.

“There are several lessons I'll take away from here, but one of the most important is leadership,” said Hensler. “The opportunities that I get out here are like nothing else, and I've also learned that the harder you work, the better you will be and the easier things will be when you're asked to perform.”

Hensler is currently attending Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles where he is majoring in business administration. “I plan to graduate in May of 2010 and get my commission to second lieutenant in June,” he said. “I plan to be a pilot or an intelligence officer.”

These college students may not get the chance to hang out at the beach or play the latest video game this summer, but the experiences they take from their training here could very easily save lives in the future.

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