

Meridian hosts NJROTC Area 8 Leadership Academy

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Staff Writer

One hundred nineteen Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (NJROTC) cadets from various southeastern high schools graduated the annual week-long NJROTC Area 8 Leadership Academy, June 19.

Cadets represented 45 high school NJROTC units from Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, West Florida and Mississippi.

Area 8 Leadership Academy's Commanding Officer Retired Capt. Jimmy Jones from Louisiana said the summer program is beneficial to young adults.

"The program emphasizes citizenship and leadership development which is one value we wanted to instill in these young kids," Capt. Jones said.

Divided into three platoons, the cadets were led and trained by platoon commanders who are Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard retirees and now employed as Naval Science instructors. Two graduate assistants, that previously completed the

NJROTC program, are assigned to each platoon.

According to cadets, they leave the leadership academy having learned intangible and valuable lessons they will take back to their schools and share with fellow NJROTC cadets.

Cadet Christian Lader, from Escambia High School in Florida, said that joining the program taught him a lot and is a great way to spend his summer.

"I have a military family," Lader said. "My dad just recently retired... before I got into high school and my brothers are both in NJROTC. They influenced me ... this is an awesome program."

Cadet Tiffany Porter, from Labelle High School in Florida, said the direction and support from her instructors and graduate assistants showed her platoon "how to come together as a team, while also teaching us the value of concepts such as integrity."

While at the academy, the cadets underwent daily routines that would be recognizable to any military veteran. Reveille sounded at 4:45 a.m., followed by physical

fitness training before the students began the rest of their daily activities. Throughout each day, until taps at 9:45 p.m., the cadet platoons split off to participate in various activities, including military drill, classes on leadership principles, personnel and room inspections, etiquette and orienteering. Each platoon also competed against each other in academics, physical fitness and drills.

The ultimate goal for the cadets is obtaining the coveted silver aiguillette, or shoulder rope, for their NJROTC uniforms. In order to earn the aiguillette, cadets must achieve passing scores on all of their academic exams and successfully pass the Navy's physical fitness test. If the students are unable to pass any portion of the program tests the first time they get a second chance, with the instructors conducting planned remedial programs to assist the students in getting through the course.

Thus, teamwork was the key to graduate from the NJROTC program. Cadets learned to work together in order to rise to the challenge of each task.