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BLT Weekend of 2022- A Promising Future for Riverhead's NJROTC

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Pictured above is Riverhead Unit's NS-1 team and upperclassmen Cadres at the 2022 Passaic Drill Competition. The NS-1 cadets placed 1st overall at the meet, which was day one out of the two day BLT weekend for Riverhead's NJROTC Unit.

BLT; Another Tradition Re-gained

The weekend of March 26th was one that many cadets anticipated in the past few months. Not only did these two days consist of a well-rehearsed-for Drill meet at Passaic high school, but also the much awaited BLT event of 2022. This typical initiation into ROTC was put on hiatus for the past two years due to COVID complications, and after waiting 7 months, the NS-1 class this year were finally able to experience this much talked about event.

Day One- Passaic Drill Competition

Before a day of MREs and orienteering, the NS-1 cadets faced a long-anticipated obstacle. The Passaic Drill competition had been at the forefront of many of the newest (and the more seasoned) cadet's minds for one particular reason. This year, only our Newest cadets were entered to compete at this drill meet. This meant that though the upperclassmen of ROTC could help the NS-1s prepare in the months leading up to the competition, they could only spectate as the NS-1 teams entered the drill deck formally.

At the Drill Competition, Riverhead entered a NS-1 Drill Squad, PT team, Color Guard, Academic Team, and an Inspection squad. Due to Riverhead's entries of only NS-1 teams, two of the five events teams would be scored in strictly NS-1 categories, while the other three events would be scrutinized with the varsity teams of other schools. Despite all of this, Riverhead's NS-1 team left New Jersey with the title of Overall First Place, winning each NS-1 event they entered in.

While all teams did a phenomenal job, the teams that competed in strictly NS-1 events stood out from the crowd. Our NS-1 Drill Team, led by Cadet Thompson, won first place in their category, notably in their first drill meet competing together. Their score here would be a crucial element in their First Place overall achievement at the meet

A NS-1, Cadet Jones, who was a member of the NS-1 team commented that “The performance went pretty good, we had some rough patches that need to be smoothed over, but overall I am 100% proud of all the work the team put in”.



Featured above: The promising NS-1 drill squad is in mid-march with their team commander Cadet Thompson to the right of the photo. The team would go on to score first place amongst their category at the Passaic Drill Meet.

Another team amongst the Riverhead victors would be the NS-1 color guard team. The team successfully placed first, well-ahead of the other NS-1 Color Guard squads. In addition, through a string of errors by fault of the Judges at the event, the team was not only graded in the NS-1 category, but also placed 3rd out of the numerous Varsity Color Guard squads.

The NS-1 Color Guard commander, Cadet McKay, seemed extremely proud when questioned after the meet. "It's a mixture of feelings, yah know? My team thought we didn't place at first, and we freaked out a bit. But when we later found out that it was a mistake and we were first in NS-1 Color Guard AND 3rd in Varsity, it was amazing. To me, it was even more incredible that the judges thought we were Varsity. I am very excited to see where my team and I go in the future.". Besides another win under the Unit's belt, the meet proved to reveal this new Color Guard squad as a promising addition to Riverhead's future drill teams.



The first place Riverhead NS-1 Color Guard team pictured above, with Cadet Herrera on Right Rifle, Cadet McKay (the team's commander) on American Flag, Cadet Thompson on Navy Flag, and Cadet Boffy on Left Rifle

Day Two- BLT

The weekend's work was not done yet for these NS-1s, as Sunday would have a whole new set of challenges in store. As stated earlier, BLT (Basic Leadership Training) was a yearly tradition for the Unit up until the year of 2021, meaning that the current NS-2 class did not get to experience this typically 2-day long event. This year is a new year though, with many old formalities beginning to fall back into place.

If you were to have stopped by Riverhead High School the morning of Sunday, March 27th, you would have been shocked to see 5 teams of NS-1s running around the High School's backfields with a compass and map in hand. Each team would be competing in the Orienteering competition they were briefed about moments before the timer's began, starting their race. For those who do not know, the Orienteering competition for the unit's BLT event consists of Cadets finding their way to various checkpoints across different terrain (although this year, the unit made due with the school grounds) with the aid of a map and compass, the winner being the team with the lowest elapsed time. Three hours of counting steps and point searching later, and one team did come out victorious, earning their Orienteering pins in addition to their Orienteering ribbons (the ribbons being given out to all cadets who parti



The Victors of the Orienteering competition are shown above the morning of BLT, all a bit frigid after searching for hours for their points using only their map, and a compass.

Soon after Orienteering came PT. Physical Fitness is considered one of the Unit's top priorities, and is valued highly amongst the cadets. Performed with a cadence called by one of the Unit's upperclassmen, the NS-1s formed 3 squads and began with stretches, followed by calisthenics. Then came the cadet's favorite part, the rigorous run around the track.

After a few cooldown stretches, the Cadets were rewarded with lunch, provided by the Navy. What were the lunches, you might be asking. At BLT it's traditional that the Cadets are offered a chance to try military MREs. These meals are what soldiers are fed in the field in modern times, and are a very educational experience for many NS-1s.

The end of lunch signifies the start of the second half of the day, drill practice. The NS-1s change into their NSUs (Navy service uniforms) and head onto the drill deck as the Cadres (volunteering upperclassmen) help them refine their marching skills and teach them how to properly march in a platoon. These skills are put to the test in a game called "Battleship", as commanders of two drill platoons must maneuver around each other using commands and provide their gunmen opportunities to knock other players out of the enemy's platoon.

After the hectic fun comes the most serious part of the day, personal inspection. Cadets are lined up into one large platoon, and three Cadres walk up and down the line, grading each cadet's uniform neatness. Questions follow the grading, making sure that the NS-1s know their basic Navy knowledge taught in class.

BLT day is wrapped up with briefings in the classroom, consisting of presentations on followership, leadership, and the importance of Administration. Before the Cadets go home, they get a well-deserved ribbon ceremony, where they are rewarded with ribbons that represent the events they participated in throughout the weekend.



Cadets in the photo above enjoy their MREs as they relax for a lunch break in the classroom. The MREs came in a variety of meals with different treats, side meals, deserts, and flavored drink powders.

The Future of the Unit

The weekend of BLT (though held late this year) is a pivotal moment for many NS-1s. This is the weekend that introduces them to the realities of Varsity drill, and what they must strive to do in order to be an upperclassmen in the unit next year. All attending the drill meet as spectators, and the Cadres at BLT witnessed the same thing on both days of the weekend, the beginning of a very promising future for Riverhead's NS-1 class.