

Although this article was written back in 1997, it provides a good account of Plebe year from someone who has been there!

## Oh-5:30 wakeup, chow calls at Navy

By RYAN HASTINGS

HeraldNet/edge writer/U.S. Naval Academy

ANNAPOLIS, Md. -- So, you want to know about the time I am having at the United States Naval Academy?

To begin, I will share with you the warning that our upperclass gave us. They said to us:

"When you go home, none of your friends will understand what you are doing here. Only someone that has been here and gone through it can understand."

I feel that this is a necessary preface, because even when I think of some of the things I have done and am doing, I am not sure I understand what I am doing here.

My summer was quite unlike the summer of almost any other freshman waiting for college to start. When you all were having fun at home, sleeping in late, partying, and working to earn money for college, I was experiencing a little thing called Plebe Summer -- one of the biggest shocks and challenges of my life.



**Ryan Hastings**



### The summer of tough love

When I arrived at the Academy, one day before I-Day (Indoctrination Day), life did not seem that bad. Nothing bad started until after I-Day. I-Day began at about 08:30 when I was supposed to report in. At this time they sent me through a maze of stations where I was issued uniforms and a ton of other gear. Blood samples were drawn, forms were filled out, and most drastic to myself, my head was shaved.

I had in the course of three or so hours been transformed from Ryan Hastings, high school graduate, into midshipman fourth-class Hastings. This was the beginning of my transition from civilian to military life.

Later that day there was a swearing-in ceremony and then we returned to the Hall (dorm). As I approached the Hall I heard a dull roar. This was the sound of my summer -- yelling. The upperclass detailers were beginning the Plebe Summer process of yelling and correcting our every mistake with physical training (PT), for example push-ups.

The rest of my summer consisted of getting up early making and remaking racks (beds), then remaking racks, an hour of PT from 06:00 to 07:00, memorizing rates (basic knowledge) and being able to recite it to the upperclass at any time, more PT, marching to classes, drill, training and a multitude of other things.

I was given basic training in many areas such as weapons training, sailing, damage control and extensive teaching on the concepts of honor and leadership. Eventually though, the summer passed and I survived.

The glorious end comes in the form of Parents Weekend when I got to see my parents for the first time in six weeks. It's the first weekend when you are allowed to make your own decisions again and remember, briefly, life on the outside. The weekend, though, came quickly to an end, and I remember walking back into the Hall having left my parents only minutes before.

The thoughtful upperclass were playing Christmas carols to remind us that the next time most of us would see our parents again would be the Christmas season.

The Ac Year (academic year) began on Aug. 20. It is a year quite unlike any other freshman year, it is Plebe Year.

### **Up and at 'em at 05:30**

At most schools you are responsible for your classes, and any other activities you get involved in. A great deal more is involved here. I get up around 05:30 every morning. I have to get up at this time to allow myself enough time to complete all my responsibilities.



I have to read three newspaper articles and be able to talk about them for three minutes each. (Later in the day at meals I will be asked to talk about what I read.) I also am responsible for knowing how many days there are until: the next Army/Navy Competition, Thanksgiving Leave, Army/Navy Football, Christmas Leave, 2/c (second class) ring dance, and 1/c Graduation. Not to mention the fact that we rate (are responsible for) knowing any rate (basic information) learned over Plebe Summer and a great deal of other information.

At 06:30 I have a comearound, which is basically a study session with an upperclass on the Pro-Topic of the week. That is Professional Topic and it's a quiz given every week testing our knowledge on areas of the Navy, for example, knowing the weapons forward to aft (front to back) on a Ticonderoga Class Guided Missile Cruiser.

Then at 07:00 five lucky preselected members of my class (there are 38 Plebes in my company) are required to give chow calls. At 10 minutes prior to meal formations we are supposed to yell (loud and fast) how long until formation, what the menu is, who the officers of the watch are, what the Pro-Topic is and what

major events there are on the yard. Yelling as such in the hall will attract the attention of at least one upperclass who will feel the need to correct something you are doing. It can range from telling you your chow call is too slow, to telling you how messed up your uniform is, to asking you any question they feel like asking you.

Needless to say, giving a chow call is not a fun experience. Meals can be a joyous experience as well. First, we sit at tables with our squad. We stand at attention answering the questions of our upperclass until given permission to sit. During the meal you only speak when spoken to and look forward at all times. During meal your upperclass will rate you on Pro-Topic knowledge, newspaper articles, and anything else they feel like. Next, classes go from 07:55 until 11:45 (each class is 50 minutes) with a break for noonmeal (complete with

chow calls) and then classes resume from 13:30 until 15:20 (1:30 until 3:20 p.m.).

Then comes sports period. Everyone is required to take a sport of some kind, be it varsity or intramural. I am on the Varsity Offshore Sailing Team. We practice until about 18:15 (6:15 p.m.) at which time we get to go for evening meal. This is a much better meal because, thanks to sailing, I get to eat at "team tables" which means I can eat like a normal person and even talk at the table. From 19:30 (7:30 p.m.) until taps (required bedtime) at 2300 (11:00 p.m.) it is study time.

## Order is everything

Practically every area of my life here has some degree of structure to it. First, there is the grouping of the student body. There are approximately 4,000 midshipmen here, about 1,000 in each class year. The student body is divided up into two regiments, six battalions and 30 companies. Each company is divided up into four platoons, each with three squads. A squad consists of about two first class (seniors), three second class (juniors) three third class (sophomores) and three plebes (freshmen). We are issued uniforms and told which one to wear at what time. Plebes are inspected daily by all upperclass at any time.



Our rooms are required to always be orderly and clean. When we are in the Hall we chop. Chopping means we have to run down the center of the hall. When we come to a corner we must round it at a 90 degree angle and yell a motivational phrase like "Go Navy!"

One of the hardest things though, is that we are not allowed to leave the yard (campus) except on Saturdays. Even when we are off the yard we are still required to be in uniform. I have not been in civilian clothes since I-Day back on July 1.

Classes are hard, too. There are about 20 people to a class. Right now I am taking calculus, chemistry, English, Naval heritage, Naval leadership and physical education, all required classes. That is a 16-hour credit load on top of all the other responsibilities. Finding time to do all the homework is a challenge. Also, staying awake in class is a challenge because everyone is so drained from work and lack of sleep.

We are told to stand up in the back of the class, if necessary, to stay awake. This is by no means an easy place to go to school.

## I wouldn't have it any other way

Do not get me wrong. This place is not all bad. In fact I like it here and I am very glad that I have come. Granted this place is not for everyone, but it is for me.

I came for the challenge, the honor and the tradition. I am getting all of these. I am being pushed beyond my limits and finding out what I am capable of. I like the Honor Concept of the school. It states that midshipmen are persons of integrity, they stand for that what is right. I also like the traditions of the school and of the Navy. Every time I catch a glimpse of my uniform I think how proud I am to be at this school and to serve my country.

Please do not think that is cliched. That is what I am here to do, learn to be the best officer I can to serve my country. I am proud to count myself as a midshipman.

Every time that the flag is raised and we stand at attention and salute, I think about those who have come before and worn the same uniform. The respect at this school astounds me and it fills me with pride.

At a normal sports event, when the flag is brought in, and the national anthem played, people still talk and forget to remove their hats, and have lost respect. Here, it goes from loud cheering to the point that it is literally so quiet you could hear a pin drop in a second as soon as the flag comes on. It is that unity, and that dedication and respect that I have seen in very few other institutions. That is one of the greatest things about this school.

***Ryan Hastings is a 1997 graduate of Snohomish High School. While there, he worked on the school newspaper and was voted its most valuable staffer. Hastings reported to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., on July 1. The photos from Annapolis were taken by Ryan's father, the Rev. David Hastings.***