

Bangor's youngest Weekend Warriors

Story and photos by **JOSN Christian P. Gearhart**

DOUBLE TIME: *Kitsap's Sea Cadets enjoy a brisk Saturday morning run as part of their training regimen. All cadets must pass the Navy's semi-annual PRT to continue their training. At top left, Cadet Jesse Cassell gets a first-hand experience of the joys of boot camp.*



Two Saturdays a month, 60 Kitsap area 11-17 year-olds gather at the SUBASE Reserve Center to get an in-depth look at the Navy and Marine Corps team. Youth in the Kitsap County U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Battalion

volunteer their time to push their minds and bodies to the limits to better themselves and make an educated decision on whether or not military life is for them.

Thanks to an extensive recruiting effort, the Kitsap Sea Cadet Battalion has grown, in a year-and-a-half, from six cadets to 60, which makes them the largest unit in Washington.

Cadets complete full 10-hour drill days and do two weeks of mini-boot camp in the summer. They advance through the enlisted ranks just as Navy Sailors do. They have to do their Seaman courses, basic military requirements, petty officer leadership exams and the semi-annual physical readiness tests.

"Unlike the Navy, we don't make them strike any particular rate because we want them to learn about all of the sea-faring rates in the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard," said retired Master Chief Petty Officer Charles Wormwood, Kitsap Battalion commanding officer. "We have very stringent requirements. Their tests are graded by Navy personnel, not by us. They are subject to the same standards as Navy Sailors," he said.

One of the requirements of cadet advancement is the completion of a two-week training cycle. Cadets can go on-board a ship, or to an advanced school such as aviation training, hospital training or master-at-arms training. Cadets can even sign up for a two-week concentrated mini Navy SEAL training held in California or Virginia.

"We have training sites all over the world - Korea, Japan, England, Bermuda, Canada, Sweden, Hong Kong and others. Most of the cadets are interested in getting aboard a ship, so we get them on an aircraft carrier, frigate or destroyer," said Wormwood. "While they are on the two-week supervised underway tour, they have to get their PQS qualifications book signed off. They do roving watches, quarterdeck watches, look-out, basic deck seamanship types of things, or they can go down and work in engineering," he said.

According to MS3 Jerry Mitchell, Kitsap Sea Cadet Battalion executive officer, the effect that the training has on the cadets leaves parents quite impressed.

"We have parents come in almost every drill and remark as to the exceptional changes that they've witnessed in their children," said Mitchell. "Parents even tell us that their children's teachers have told them that they have noticed a positive difference in their attitudes and performance in school.

"It's on the news everyday - kids in trouble, kids on drugs, kids getting arrested and kids having kids. It's frustrating to see so many problems in youth today as we do," said Mitchell. "One of our goals with this program is to help these kids make a quality decision about their lives.

"We try to instill in them a sense of pride, discipline, self respect and respect of others. This is kind of a cliché, but these kids are the future of America. If we can set them on a positive path, or at least help in doing that, then I feel like we've made a big accomplishment," he said.

"I like doing this because it keeps me out of trouble and it's better and more fun than school," said Cadet Kimberly Wormwood, 12. "It gives me something to do on Saturdays other than wasting time," she said.

"It is extremely rewarding to me when parents tell us that their children are doing better in school, their discipline levels have increased and they are more respectful," Mitchell said.

"I've had parents come in and say 'My kid has never answered me yes ma'am or no ma'am, and now they are doing it'. A lot of parents are starting to see this program as something they can rely on to help in their efforts at home, particularly if they have had problems in the past with discipline or self confidence," said Mitchell.

"My son is a cadet, he went through boot camp last year, and I've seen a lot of personal growth in him as a direct result of this program," said Alan Lamoureux, Kitsap Sea Cadet parent support group leader. "He has progressed to the point where he is a squad leader. He is now responsible for some of the younger cadets himself. It is a major step for him. I see a lot more respect. I see a higher self esteem, and he sees himself in a more positive light.

"It's great to see the growth the cadets go through in this program. The instructors have excellent report with the kids. Better 'I hate to say it,' than a lot of parents do, as far as trying to get the kids regimented and following directions," he said.

One of the points stressed by all of the Sea Cadet training instructors is that there is no pressure given to the cadets to join any military service.

"We are not recruiters," said Wormwood. "We don't push them into the service. Our job is to educate them so that they can make an intelligent decision on whether-or-not a military career is what they want to pursue. Most of the Cadets have no intention of joining the military, but they want the teamwork, leadership and exposure to seamanship that we can offer them," he said.

"I'm signing up because I plan on going into the military when I'm 18, and this program will give me an idea of what I will have to go through," said new recruit Tim Cartwright, 15.

Cadets with a military future in mind will be pleased to know that experience with the battalion count toward Navy advancement.

"If a cadet stays with the program until they are 18, or a minimum of two years and they have maintained satisfactory evaluations they can graduate as an E-3 in Navy Basic Training or as an E-2 in Marine Corps Basic Training.

"We want people to know that they have another option besides JROTC and Boy Scouts. There is

another option out there, and it is a very good option," said Mitchell.

Active duty military or civilians, 18 or older, can volunteer to help out. "We have a great training program for the volunteer instructors so they can properly train the cadets," said Mitchell.

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