

SOTU aims to improve cadets' field performance



Photo courtesy of SOTU

The Special Operations Training Unit trains cadets through high-speed endurance runs, calisthenics, land navigation and self defense.

By Amy Protas
THE BATTALION

The Navy has the SEAL Platoon; the Marines have RECON and the Army has the Red Rangers. Now, the Air Force reserves at A&M has its own unit — the Special Operations Training Unit.

SOTU's mission is to familiarize cadets in the tactics and training of the Air Force's Special Operations Units. Another goal is to improve overall Field Training Camp performance, which includes improving the unit's 1.5-mile run scores.

It works toward these goals by putting cadets through high-speed endurance runs and calisthenics. The unit also practices rappelling, rock climbing, land navigation, self defense and team tactics.

Mark Andrews, a junior management major, said SOTU was formed this semester so the Air Force could have its own special unit.

"The reason we started it was because all other major units have theirs," Andrews said. "We started ours to fill that void. There aren't any other Air Force special operations training in the nation. It's been going pretty well."

Dr. Thomas Goulter, SOTU adviser and an aerospace professor, said the special ROTC units are formed because of cadet demand.

"The ROTC units offer things these young, impetuous cadets like to do," Goulter said. "It is modeled after the Air Forces' Combat Control Teams and Pararescue."

After a few semesters, some cadets may become disinterested and apathetic toward the Corps.

David Navarro, commander of SOTU and a senior political science and international studies major, said the special units give the cadets something to

look forward to.

"I did this as a freshman and a sophomore in the Marine Corps version," Navarro said. "So I wanted to do something like this for the Air Force. We're trying to give cadets something to aspire to — especially for sophomores and juniors who start to slow down."

Navarro said since this is the first semester for SOTU, it has been hard to get the organization established.

"Not a lot of people have confidence the Air Force could do something like this," Navarro said. "When they look at us, all they think we can do is fly."

Anyone can join SOTU because it is an A&M organization. However, there are currently only members of the Corps of Cadets in SOTU.

Navarro said being a member of SOTU is a huge responsibility.

"These guys are volunteering to do this," Navarro said. "They're up at 5:30 every morning except on Wednesdays. It's added responsibility, and they must maintain a level with their unit."

One of the special operations activities the unit does is go to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio.

Goulter said going to San Antonio two weeks ago gave the cadets hands-on experience in special operations.

"Lackland is where they train and select combat controllers and Pararescue trainees," Goulter said. "The program is really rigorous. They might start out with 90-100 recruits and graduate only nine or 10."

Andrei Mitran, a junior political science major, said he has confidence SOTU will remain on the A&M campus.

"There are always people who want to do something extra," Mitran said. "I see myself coming in 20 years, and SOTU will still be here."

Toys bring this year's Christmas in the Park festivities to life

By Amy Uptmor
THE BATTALION

More than 100,000 Christmas lights, a gigantic, three-dimensional Rudolph and a larger-than-life toy box will transform College Station's Central Park into this year's Christmas in the Park.

Christmas in the Park has been a College Station tradition since 1984. Approximately 150 people helped in the construction of the park, which began in October. Anel Bow, supervisor for the College Station Parks and Recreation department, said.

This is Bow's first year to work with Christmas in the Park, so some additions will be apparent to yearly visitors. Bow, who had never seen Christmas in the Park before, said she used her own vision when developing the event.

"I just made it how I thought it should look," she said.

This year's theme is Magical Toyland, Bow said. Decorations include a "live" toy box, which includes a 30-foot train and building blocks with "toys that magically come to life," Bow said. Costumed characters include toy soldiers, Raggedy Ann and Andy and a Jack-in-the-Box.

Along with the themed decorations, the park will also be filled with dancing elves, and the pond will be decorated with a jumping dolphin made of lights.

Bow said planning for this year's event began almost immediately after last year's Christmas in the Park.

Such amounts of planning are understandable, given the number of people that come to see the display, Bow said.

"We get 2,000 to 4,000 people per night on open house nights, and a lot more just drive by," she said. "We'll have a counter set up this year, so we'll know exactly how many people go."

Open house nights are Friday through Sunday the next two weekends. During open houses, visitors are able to see performers ranging from Aggie Wranglers to the Stephen F. Austin Varsity Choir at the park's new outdoor, theatrical stage.

Santa Claus will be available to take wish lists for children of all ages during the park's open house nights, which last from 6:30 to 9:30. Free hayrides, carriage rides, hot chocolate and cookies will be available during open house nights.

In keeping with the spirit of Christmas, the A&M United Methodist Church is producing a live nativity scene.

Bow described the event as "radiant" and "a brilliant way to ring in the holidays."

"A trip through Christmas in the Park is, in the words of the song, like 'walking in a winter wonderland,'" she said.



Gwendolyn Struve, THE BATTALION

Marianne James of College Station sets up Santa's Workshop for the Magical Toyland at Central Park Headquarters.

The perfect crime proves to be a tough test

I've never been a very ambitious criminal. My record consists of being sent to the principal's office in the third grade for yelling on the bus, failing to control my speed of one mph in a 35 mph speed zone and failing to control a traveling trash can.

Yes, as Bonnie and Clyde had their sawed-off shotguns, as Jeffrey Dahmer had his crock pot, I have my weapon that has brought trouble with the law and left me in the loser's circle — my trash can.

Last week, I found myself sitting on a witness stand testifying in front of a judge for allowing my trash can to get too close to the alley that runs behind my house.

It began in early October with the arrival of a ticket in the mail. Checked on the corner of the ticket was a box with the words "Container on curb" printed next to it. It took me a while to figure out exactly what the meaning of the citation was, and only a second to be dumfounded by the fact that this ticket was going to cost me \$35.

Not wanting to shell out that much money on account of a wandering trash can, I headed to the municipal court to file my plea. This was where I found out I would have to go to court and still pay \$35 to secure the court date. I considered paying the fine and erasing the ordeal from my mind.

When I told people I was going to court to

RACHEL BARRY
COLUMNIST



defend my trash can, the response was always the same. First laughter, and then an assurance that the experience in court would be painless, and, if anything, would be a good story to tell when comparing "run-in with the law scars" at parties.

Feeling that the officer who gave me the ticket would have better things to do than show up in court for migrating trash cans, I imagined I would explain what happened and be on my way with a refund check from the city in the mail. Instead, the officer was there, along with his lawyer and a stone-faced judge ready to strike down my delinquent trash can.

Stunned into nervous laughter, I sat down and watched the case in progress. The man on the stand was in the same position I was in. His trash can had also made that capricious move to pavement and had been duly spanked with a citation.

I shrank back in horror as I realized he had something I was lacking — evidence. He had pictures and city ordinances. I had nothing but the weak argument that had filled my head over the last month.

After it was determined that both sides were finished discussing the case, the judge examined the photographs of the alleged guilty trash cans and dismissed both of the parties, giving them a week to come up with their final and best arguments for their case.

Now it was my turn. As I approached the stand to give my plea, the unexpectedly serious tone of the courtroom left me feeling inclined to answer, "Absolutely, 100 percent not guilty." Instead, I whispered a simple "not guilty" and raised my hand to be sworn in.

The rest was a blur. After giving my side of the story, the officer's lawyer proceeded to drill me with questions only a rookie attorney could admire. Had I been given a copy of the city ordinances when I moved in? How often did I take the trash out? If I hadn't lived there when the warnings were given, who had?

I imagine his proudest moment came when he looked at me with his penetrating eyes and asked with all sincerity, "Would it surprise you to find that your trash is picked up on Fridays?" I almost choked on my laughter. The only thing surprising to me was that not knowing the intimacies of my trash pick-up had landed me in court.

I wanted to remind him and the judge that this was about a trash can, not Watergate.

Deciding he had "not heard much of a defense," the judge found me guilty and told me to follow the bailiff to the window to pay.

I left the courtroom in a daze, wondering if my first experience with the justice system had been justified.

I guess I'll just conspire with my trash can to rub out the trash man the next time he gets too close to my yard.

Rachel Barry is a junior journalism major

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