

Twin West Point students tell new plebes what to expect

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Beast barracks. Lots of yelling and put-downs. For twins Justin and Jason Shafer, Harrison High School graduates who just completed their first year as plebes at the United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., those were part of the hardest job they learned to love.

Each recently explained West

Point life to Christopher Yheulon and William Pyant, who just graduated from Harrison High School and will enter West Point in July. Also listening in was Chris Kuclo, a potential candidate, who will be a senior at the high school next year.

All are Farmington Hills residents and knew each other through their participation on sports teams.

Up front, the Shafers said,

beast barracks is a misnomer—they're just tests. But that's just the beginning of what will be a whole new world.

"It's totally different than high school," said Justin Shafer. "You aren't treated with respect at first. You have to earn that respect, by putting up with it."

Some plebes "apart" out and yell back at the upperclassmen, he said. That's not a good idea. "You can't respond back," Jason said.

That's tough when plebes hear, "There's 3,000 candidates who are waiting to take your place. Do you have that drive inside of you? Why did you even apply?"

Even the smallest detail is important, the Shafers said. A large rule book addresses the most minute details for how their rooms are kept, like which direction the heads of hangers must tilt and the direction toothbrushes should face.

The day starts at 4 a.m., with a schedule that changes daily. They put physical training gear on, do push-ups and embark on five-mile runs with people of their speed on their characteristic hilly terrain.

"They are not little hills," said

Maj. Kathleen Lynch, a West Bloomfield resident who is a zip area coordinator and admissions field representative. "They are long and steep."

At West Point's mess hall, 4,400 cadets are fed at the same time for every meal. "The lower classmen, the plebes, are required to do the table duties," Lynch said.

There's a cold and hot beverage corporal, a gunner and 13 condiments which are opened properly at every table. Rules for eating include that the cadets must sit one first from the table and one first in front of the backs of their chairs.

The strenuous exercise builds up a strong appetite, said Justin. He didn't often eat breakfast in high school, but found himself eating two bowls of cereals and four cups of yogurt at West Point.

Cadets can't even think of skipping shaving, as Justin did once because he was too tired at 2 a.m. after a march. "Four of them (upperclassmen) saw me at once and said 'What's this scruff on your face?'"

His instructions for the next day were to shave, come to them at 4 a.m. and say, "Sir, I shaved this morning. I'm a big boy now."

They also read a "Knowledge Book," information they are required to memorize.

And then, there's Beast 2, which is field training. Plebes learn about cold and hot weather wounds, first aid and military skills like rappelling and bivouacking.

It's tough, but survivable with the right philosophy. "Take it day by day with the knowledge it will be done soon," Justin advised.

The Shafers are yearlings or yucks, now. The juniors are cows; the seniors, firsties. The Corps of Cadets includes all four classes. Cadets take five regular college classes, with about 15 cadets in each class. Each cadet is issued a computer.

A tradition

Stepped in history West Point cadets abide by the honor code and honor system: "A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal or tolerate those who do."



Hmmm: Chris Kuclo, Christopher Yheulon and William Pyant III listen to tales of life at West Point.

The institution will celebrate its 200th anniversary next year. Upon graduation, the students will join the ranks of other graduates like Gen. George Patton.

West Point is the oldest regularly garrisoned military post in United States and has been continuously occupied since Jan. 20, 1778, according to information contained in the West Point catalog. It is the nation's first engineering school.

Applicants must receive a nomination from an authorized source to be considered for an appointment to the military academy. The Shafers were nominated by their Sen. Spencer Abraham, Yheulon by Congressman Joseph Knollenberg, and Pyant by Sen. Carl Levin. Basic

eligibility requirements are specified by law. Evaluation is made in the areas of academics, leadership potential and physical aptitude.

"This is an historic thing for Harrison," Lynch said. "It's rare to get twins in."

Each candidate must be a U.S. citizen, at least 17 and not yet 23 on July 1, must not be married, pregnant, nor have a legal obligation to support a dependent. For more information, call Lynch at (248) 708-0941.

Other cadets from the Farmington area and their graduating year are: Sean Clark, 2002; Tom Beierschmitt, 2003; Fritz Schultes, 2004; and John James, 2004.

Famous West Point graduates

- Robert E. Lee, Class of 1828, Superintendent of the Academy
 - William Tecumseh Sherman, Class of 1840
 - Henry O. Flipper, Class of 1877, first black graduate
 - Douglas C. MacArthur, Class of 1903, graduated first in class
 - Dwight D. Eisenhower, Class of 1915, Commander of Allied Forces and 38th President of the United States
 - Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin Jr., Class of 1951, astronaut, second man to walk on the moon
 - Norman Schwarzkopf, Class of 1956, Commander of Allied Forces in the Persian Gulf War
 - Kristin Baker, Class of 1990, first woman to become the First Captain of the Corps of Cadets
- Two famous West Pointers never obtained degrees: author Edgar Allan Poe and artist James Abbot McNeill.

—Sue Buck



Yucks: West Pointers Jason and Justin Shafer visited Harrison High School on Thursday morning.

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