

Naval Sea Cadet Program Can Be Stepping Stone to Service Academies

By PETER ATKINSON, Deputy Editor

While most high school seniors were anxiously awaiting the mail for their college acceptance letters to arrive, Adam Drucker, a senior at Pine Crest School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., was having his hand-delivered by a U.S. congresswoman.

During the Fort Lauderdale Council's Dec. 17 dinner meeting, Drucker, the cadet chief petty officer of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps' (NSCC's) Spruance Division, was presented with his appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy by U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., along with a personal Certificate of Congressional Recognition. Wasserman Schultz, whose district includes Fort Lauderdale, earlier had nominated Drucker for appointment.

"I was truly honored that she came here to make the presentation personally," Drucker said. "It's a real honor to receive the appointment, to be accepted at the academy."

As someone who has wanted to be a Navy SEAL since he was 6 years old, the appointment was "a dream come true," he said. The academy will allow him to pursue his

career goal, while at the same time honoring his parents' wish that he receive a college education.

"The Naval Academy is the best place to do both," said Drucker, who also applied to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

He joins a growing group of cadets from the Spruance Division who have gone on to a service academy. He will be the seventh division cadet to attend the Naval Academy. Two other cadets currently are midshipmen there — Tim Nasta and 2006 Sea Cadet of the Year Jessica Vance.

Another cadet, Petty Officer 2nd Class Joshua Kotler, has received his nomination, but is on the wait list, according to Lt. Cmdr. Alan Starr, NSCC, Spruance Division commanding officer.

Three other division cadets are attending the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, he said.

"I have no real secrets to success, I just try to constantly motivate our cadets to learn the tools for success: respect and doing the 'right thing in life,'" Starr said.

For the more than 7,850 cadets enrolled in 362 units in the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the NSCC — along with the Navy League Cadet Corps — can be a definite stepping stone for admission into a service academy or acceptance into a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at a college or university.

According to NSCC statistics, in 2008 there were more than 720 former Sea Cadets enrolled at the Naval Academy, Coast Guard Academy, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, one of the state maritime academies or in an ROTC program.

The NSCC has placed more cadets at the Naval Academy than any other youth organization in the country. For the class that began in 2008, 162 of the 1,262 new midshipmen, roughly 13 percent, are former Sea Cadets, according Michael Ford, NSCC executive director.

"Everyone I have talked with from our unit who has been to the Naval Academy has said they felt well prepared," Drucker said. "I feel well prepared."

"The Sea Cadets get you in the mindset of serving in the military," Midshipman Brook M. Stevens, former leading petty officer with the NSCC's Sacramento, Calif., Division, said in an e-mail response. "Although [drilling and training] is only once a month and dur-



LYNN ATKINSON DRUCKER

Spruance Division, Fla., Cadet Chief Petty Officer Adam Drucker stands with U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., after being presented with his U.S. Naval Academy appointment by the congresswoman Dec. 17 in Fort Lauderdale. Drucker will be the seventh Spruance Division cadet to attend the Naval Academy.



U.S. NAVY

Marine Staff Sgt. Christopher Reid, a member of the Marine Corps Reserve, briefs 40 U.S. Naval Sea Cadets on combat field tactics as part of their field medical training Aug. 23 during a three-week course sponsored by the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps' Region 13.

ing the summers, Sea Cadets gives you a good background for when you start your time down one of the officer or enlisted pipelines.”

Stevens is finishing up his first year at the Naval Academy, where he is majoring in Arabic. Fellow Sacramento Division cadet Cameron Thornberry also is at the academy.

Most Sea Cadet training is carried out at local Navy, Coast Guard or other military facilities. That training is supplemented with summer training, starting with a two-week, Navy-approved NSCC recruit program encompassing a broad range of basic military subjects, followed by advanced skills and operational specialties training ranging from seamanship and scuba diving to health care, aviation, leadership and homeland security training.

At-sea training on Navy ships and Coast Guard cutters also is available, as is a U.S. Naval Academy Summer Seminar.

Drucker has been involved with the Cadet Corps/Sea Cadet program for seven years, and has been able gain a wide variety of training experience. During summers, he spent four weeks in Sea Cadet Construction Battalion field training in Michigan, four weeks aboard the Sea Cadet training vessel USNSCS *Grayfox* on the Great Lakes, two weeks at Camp Roberts, Calif., receiving small unit com-

bat training and three weeks at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Va., training with Navy SEALs.

“It was condensed, but it was very intense,” Drucker said of the SEAL training. “I loved it, I really connected with it.”

Stevens joined the Sea Cadets “relatively late,” as a high school sophomore in 2006, but was able to gain valuable experience and leadership skills doing explosive ordnance disposal and diving operations training in Norfolk, Va., and as senior cadet leading a group of 20 new Sea Cadets during recruit training in Washington.

“I valued the experiences I encountered and believe that I am a better leader because of them,” he said.

Stevens, who aspires to join the Marine Corps and pick up a Human Source Intelligence Officer billet, then, perhaps later, transfer into the Foreign Area Officer community, has kept in touch with his former unit, attending a division drill over

winter break and posting updates of his academy experiences on the division’s Web site. He also has made himself available via e-mail to offer advice to cadets who may be interested in pursuing academy admission.

While Stevens believes his experience in the Sea Cadets “was the turning point for my nomination,” he suggests cadets highlight the breadth of their interests and experiences if they decide to apply.

“Dedication to what you are passionate about is a key in your application,” he said. “It doesn’t have to be military related. If you are passionate about baseball and have played your entire life, make sure they know. The main thing to remember is that the academy is looking for the all-around picture to determine if you will be able to survive here, because there are so many things that you must get done in a week and it takes time management and determination to get it all done.”

Added Drucker, “Study hard and practice for the CFA [candidate fitness assessment], practice the events [which include a mile run, a shuttle run, push-ups, pull-ups, etc.,] that’s the main thing.”

Drucker will begin his plebe summer at the Naval Academy July 1. ■

Information on the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps or Navy League Cadet Corps is available online at www.seacadets.org/public/