

OCS Newsletter

May 2024 | Issue 10



OCS Class 64
"Calm in the Chaos"



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CLASS REFLECTION

Written by OCS Class 64

After a successful field training in Camp Navajo, and another brief stay in the beautiful woods on the horizon, Officer Candidate Class 64 is feeling prepared and in high spirits. With growing emphasis on receiving, rehearsing, and giving a squad level OPORD in a limited amount of time, our last drill tested our skills in leading a small element to successfully complete a mission. Now with more of an idea of what we will expect for our final evaluations when we leave for our Annual Training in July to Washington, our class feels confident we will be successful in graduating in September with our Gold Bar.



(Left to right) OC Luis Rivera, OC William Mauro, OC Charles Dozal, and OC Matthew Todd hiked Camelback Mountain to represent OCS Class 64 in the community. They had the opportunity to meet a few Vietnam-era veterans while at the top and learned of their time in service. One even shared a history lesson of guidons and how they were used as communication signals to officers in battle during the Civil War.

CLASS LEADERSHIP REFLECTION – Platoon Leader

According to the Officer Candidate (OC) Guide, the platoon leader (PL) “commands the platoon and is responsible for the morale, welfare, and discipline of his or her subordinates.” Additionally, the PL is “ultimately responsible for everything the platoon does or fails to do.”



Class Platoon Leader (PL)

Written by OC Tayler Hildebrandt

Having almost six weeks between March and April IDT allowed the ability to have a holistic view of planning. I was able to meet with classmates to study STX lanes, get opinions from many experienced people, and have daily communication with OC Todd (PSG). This gave ample time to plan for the strengths and weaknesses of the platoon.

We were able to get a solid base of where everyone stood when it came to passing the STX lanes. This led to the candidates who excelled with the lanes being coaches and mentors for those still learning. Being PL during April’s IDT gave me a lot of confidence in my ability to make decisions in a high-stress environment and to trust my teammates to complete the tasks that are given to them.

OC Todd and I were stepping into new territory when it came to infantry tactics. We did our best by reading FMs and the Ranger Handbook, meeting and discussing plans frequently, and ultimately working together as a team of leaders. Despite our best efforts and planning strategies, the tactics did not matter as long as we were able to communicate our plan effectively and efficiently.

Officer Candidate School provides a rigorous amount of planning and preparation for a true leader’s mindset. Being the leader involves bringing a group of candidates together at different parts of life to achieve a common goal – an opportunity to be a part of the Officer Corps. With this goal comes a level of responsibility and trust that only those with proper planning, preparation, and leadership skills can achieve.

The bond between the candidates has proven beneficial in the fifteen months of training thus far with frequent communication, words of encouragement, sharing of ideas and advice, and working as a team. With the months that remain, the leadership skills and abilities of our candidates will carry us through.

CLASS LEADERSHIP REFLECTION – Platoon Sergeant

According to the Officer Candidate (OC) Guide, the platoon sergeant (PSG) “is the principal assistant to the platoon leader (PL).” The PSG assumes command of the platoon in the absence of the PL and assists in several ways including, accurate account of platoon members and accountability of sensitive items and equipment.”



Class Platoon Sergeant (PSG)

Written by OC Matthew Todd

During April IDT, I served as platoon sergeant for our first field drill and STX lanes of the year. One of the key things I learned was that leadership is not just about giving orders and making decisions. It is also about building relationships with those you lead, understanding their needs and motivations, and working to empower them to achieve their goals.

Collectively, our goals are working toward building our expertise to pass Phase 3 and, ultimately, the OCS program. I am proud of our class's work leading up to and through the weekend to make it a successful training IDT.

As a leader, I realized that my actions and attitudes set the tone for the moment, the STX lane, the day, and the weekend. I also learned that leadership requires a great deal of self-awareness. I needed to be aware of my own strengths and weaknesses, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of those around me. I needed to be willing to learn from my mistakes and seek out feedback to continually improve my leadership abilities.

Finally, I learned that leadership is a constant process of growth and development. Despite gaining experience and confidence in my role, I realized there was always more to learn and new challenges. I also learned that the best way to continue growing as a leader is to remain humble, open-minded, and willing to learn from others.

I am confident in OCS Class 64 and know we will complete our goal of completing the program and ultimately commissioning as officers.

COMMANDER INTERVIEW

Written by OC Charles Dozal

This month, we interview CPT Felicia Sanchez former Company Commander of 222nd Transportation Company.



Q: Why did you choose Transportation as your branch?

A: I chose the Transportation branch when I first commissioned because I was prior enlisted 88M and loved the job so much I did not want to leave it. Once you complete Captain's Career Course, your branch becomes logistics.

Q: What are important skills for an Army leader to have?

A: Patience and empathy. Patience because as a leader, everyone will test your patience. Whether its subordinates, peers, or your own leadership. As a leader, you need to learn to take a pause before you react and think about how you are going to react and what you are going to say. You also need empathy because not everyone has the same life experiences or experience in general. You never truly know what is going on in someone's life. If you have a Soldier in trouble, try and understand why the Soldier did what they did so you can give them the proper tools and resources to change their decisions and hopefully better their life. Showing that extra care might be all that it takes to get someone on the right path.

Q: What is the best part of being a commander?

A: The best part of being a commander was being able to plan training that allowed my Soldiers to do what they love doing best, and that was drive. Soldiers signed up to be 88M, so they should be on the road driving. Yes, we all have admin drills, but find a way to maximize training so the Soldiers can do what they signed up for.

Q: What is the most challenging part of being a commander?

A: Punishing Soldiers. Nobody likes to be the bad guy. But the Army has rules in order to keep discipline and order in good standing. I did not like taking pay or rank from Soldiers but as a commander you have a responsibility to ensure you uphold that good standing and order. If not, your company will be in complete anarchy.

Q: How do you handle conflict on the team?

A: I handle conflict straight on. Be direct. Be specific about the problem and issues at hand and offer solutions for a way forward. Ignoring conflict just allows it to grow. And if I feel I cannot solve the conflict on my own, I will seek out help. Currently I have a conflict going on. I have since sought out help from an E8 to help me resolve what I feel like is an issue which could destroy the cohesiveness of my team. Be humble and do not be afraid to ask for help.

COMMANDER INTERVIEW (Cont.)

Q: How do you keep your unit/Soldiers motivated?

A: During my time as a commander, I kept my Soldiers motivated by maximizing driver's training, ensuring they always had hot chow when it was owed to them, and addressing pay issues. Two things you make sure the Soldiers always have is chow and pay. You keep those two things straight and Soldiers will do their job.

Q: What advice would you provide to Officer Candidates?

A: The advice I would provide to officer candidates are 1) attention to detail, and 2) be open to learning. Attention to detail is critical for officers. Our work will always be critiqued because, "that's why we make the big money." No matter what you do, your work will always be looked at with a fine-tooth comb. So, ensure you present a good product that took the time and patience to develop. Don't just half-ass things. For number 2, even though you are in charge of Soldiers, you do not know everything. You need to learn your job, humble yourself, and be willing to learn from your NCOs.

Q: As a commander, what are the most important qualities/attributes you look for in new LTs joining your command?

A: As a commander, qualities and attributes I look for in new LTs is common sense, motivation to learn, and a desire to do good.

Q: What are the most important challenges the Army faces today? And how can new LTs be a part of the solution?

A: There are way too many challenges the Army faces for me to list them all or try and prioritize. The only thing I can think of for a new LT being part of a solution is ensuring your Soldiers know you have an open-door policy. Even though you're not in a command position, ensure your Soldiers understand you are available for them, whatever the case may be.

Q: What advice would you give to new LTs when they reach their first unit?

A: Advice I would give new LTs when they reach their first unit is to take 3 months to observe how everything is done. Do not come in hard charging trying to change everything all at once. First do your observation, see what works, what doesn't, then work together with your PSG to ensure you develop a plan together. And once again, be open to learning from your NCOs. They are the ones who have been doing the job longer than you. They are the experts. Listen and learn.

Q: Finally, what books would you recommend to aspiring leaders?

A: For new leaders, I would recommend the Jocko Podcast. He has some pretty amazing episodes and interviews. For new leaders, I would also recommend, "The First 100 Days of Platoon Leadership."

OFFICER CANDIDATE SPOTLIGHT

Written by OC Edward McFadden



Officer Candidate Edward McFadden enlisted in the Arizona Army National Guard in 2020 as a 42A, Human Resources Specialist, assigned to HHC, 253rd EN BN in Florence, AZ. OC McFadden was born in Tucson, but grew up in Ludlow, Pennsylvania, in the heart of the Allegheny National Forest. He worked with the 158th MEB BDE S1 Shop, managing the COVID orders, then the JTF Badge supporting Hayden Police Department, and the AZDEMA Procurement Office helping to manage the border funding allocated through AZDEMA.

Q: Why did you join the Army National Guard?

A: I joined the Arizona Army National Guard during a time in my life that lacked a lot of structure. After leaving the routine and focused lifestyle of college and starting my career in finance in Tucson, I craved a structured environment with established rules. When COVID dragged things to an unexpected halt, it gave me the excuse I needed to finally do something that I had always wanted to do, ever since I was a kid.

Q: How would people describe you?

A: You would have to ask them. Let me know what you find out.

Q: What is your educational background?

A: I switched majors a lot. I started out at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, my Alma Mater, as a biology student with dreams of Pre-Med. I liked the idea of helping people who need it the most, but I found the coursework to be a bad fit for me, and I couldn't imagine another four years of it. I switched at that point to Psychology, another field, I thought, of medical care, only focused on unseen aches and pains rather than the biological ones. It interested me and I excelled at it. I still enjoy thinking about how the brain works. I finally switched to Business Economics in an effort to "get a real degree," and I am glad that I did. My education at Clarion University has opened so many doors. I can't imagine where I would be without it.

OFFICER CANDIDATE SPOTLIGHT (Cont.)

Q: What does leadership mean to you?

A: Leadership to me is all about validity. I think that you have to be a bona fide expert in a field to be effective at leading, coaching, mentoring, or admonishing another person in that field. That means years of relevant experience, with a proven track record of improvement. It also means sound judgement in that field that a reasonable person would find logical and trustworthy. All the leaders that I look up to in my own life have a good deal of validity.

Q: What do you want to branch after OCS?

A: I would love to branch with the EOD Battalion. It remains to be seen, but I think the job would be so fascinating and rewarding. I would hope that, by gaining knowledge of explosive ordinances and the mechanics of explosive devices, I could transfer those skills and knowledge points to my job at Raytheon in Tucson.

Q: What are your long-term career goals?

A: I definitely want to spend 20 years in the Army. It keeps life interesting, and it does provide a lot of benefits. I would hope for a command position in the next five to seven years. The experience in that role would be truly invaluable. I would also like to diversify my income over time by buying and renting property in Southern Arizona. I feel strongly that the rate of growth in Tucson alone would give any property a very high return on investment. Besides this, I have always been drawn to the hospitality industry as well. My wife and I would be very motivated to start an AirBnB of our own in Tucson if the opportunity arises.

OFFICER CANDIDATES TRAIN TLPs AT CAMP NAVAJO

Written by OC William Mauro

Officer Candidates are required to complete a Field Leadership Exercise (FLX) during Phase III of the program in which they are evaluated on their ability to successfully lead Soldiers throughout the planning, preparation, and execution of missions in a simulated combat environment given a squad size element.

To prepare for their FLX, OCS Class 64 has spent several Phase II IDTs learning Troop Leading Procedures (TLPs) along with how to receive a platoon-level operations order (OPORD) and then plan, prepare, and issue a squad-level OPORD. During April IDT, OCS Class 64 was able to travel (by Black Hawks) to Camp Navajo where they were able to put their classroom instructions into practice.

From the moment the helicopters landed to the time they took off on Sunday, OCs were being issued OPORDs and rotating squad assignments to test their ability to lead (and follow) during several mission sets including a squad attack, movement to contact, reconnaissance patrols, and squad ambushes. They were also required to train patrol base operations and use their land navigation skills to move their troops from objective to objective.

OCS Class 64 will return to Camp Navajo again during their May IDT to refine what they learned in April. This training is vital to their preparation and success during Phase III where they will travel to Joint Base Lewis-McChord and be evaluated on one of their final program requirements to graduate from OCS.



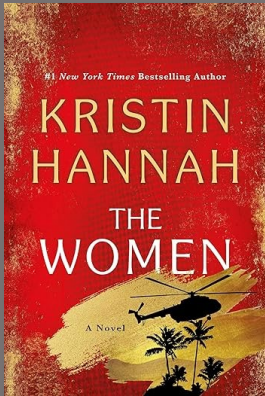
OC Jefferson Doane (left) and OC DeShay Harper (right) ready to take off in a UH-60 Black Hawk to Camp Navajo.



OC Charles Dozal with the M240 machine gun ready to step off on another STX lane to prepare candidates for Field Leadership Exercise evaluations during Phase III.

BOOK REVIEW

Written by OC Sandra Santos



The Women

By Kristin Hannah

Published: February 2024

★★★★★ (4.7/5.0)

The Women is an historical fiction in which we are reminded that women can be heroes too. In 1965, while the Vietnam war was going on, Frances “Frankie” McGrath had a revelation after hearing someone say, “Women can be heroes” and decided to join the Army as a Combat Nurse.

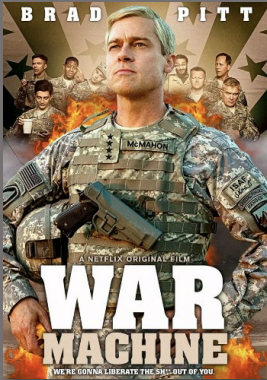
Coming from a family of men who served, she followed her brother's steps and was amongst the first woman to join, especially from her family. At that time, not many women had joined the military and were frowned upon. Despite her own family’s shame, Frankie felt such pride to be able to do what she was passionate about while serving her country. Without any experience or knowledge of what war was like, Frankie was sent to Vietnam.

To her surprise, she found herself overwhelmed by the chaos and destruction of war. If it wasn't for the other women she served with, she wouldn't have been able to get through. The other nurses she served with became like sisters to her. They taught her everything she needed to know and were there for her through the everyday struggles of war. Having no other option but to adapt to survive, Frankie learned her job, became a master at it, and got through two tours in Vietnam and saved many lives. However, the real battle was when she returned home to a changed America who wanted to forget Vietnam and had no respect for those who risked their life at war. Returning veterans were often called “baby killers” and had no support or respect for their sacrifice, not to mention the women who served, whose sacrifice and commitment to their country has too often been forgotten.

This novel relates to OCS because it truly shows the power of teamwork and having your sisters/brothers to count on. We are all different and all have different skills. It is important to have people who understand and are there with you to embrace the suck. Nobody truly understands what Soldiers go through more than the people we serve with. More often than not, Soldiers struggle to go back to society because they do not feel like they have the same support as they do from the people they went through difficulties with. In addition, OCS is teaching us to be able to adapt to stressful environments in order to better prepare for war. Preparing our bodies and minds to be able to react to stressful situations can be the difference between making the right or wrong decision within a split second. Nonetheless, as leaders, we need to be able to make quick decisions and lead our Soldiers to complete the mission while staying safe.

MOVIE REVIEW

Written by OC Charles Dozal



War Machine

Directed By: David Michôd

Release Date: May 24, 2017

★★★★☆ (4.0/5.0)

This film has a little bit of action for viewers expecting a story about combat. We see a squad moving to contact, something our class has been training on quite recently (not a terrible example, even though it is a bunch of Marines on the screen), but this film mostly provides a glimpse of what things may look like at the very top of the chain of command. Though it is full of satire, I was surprised to learn that the plot is based on an actual person. However, most of what is going on in the film will not seem foreign to US service members that have been around for a while.

Our protagonist is the man freshly tasked with command of coalition forces in Afghanistan, Army four-star General Glen McMahon. We are introduced to his entourage and staff, whom I should add, do not represent American officers well. First takeaway from this film is what you do in, and out of, uniform can affect your career and the reputation of your service and country. Once the audience has an idea of the group dynamics, the story goes on to show an energetic leader showing up to a new command and facing resistance to the change he wants to implement. Another takeaway, do not be discouraged as a young leader who is trying to change and improve a new command, even seasoned leaders struggle with this at the top.

In his frustration, General McMahon takes the wrong path: he criticizes his boss (the United States President). Word of this eventually reaches the President because the General's staff brought in a journalist that then publicized these comments as well as behavior by that staff that may have seemed innocent at the time but were interpreted as inappropriate. Yet another lesson for aspiring leaders; be careful of what you tolerate and take a proactive role in creating a proper, well-disciplined culture. In the end, the General is replaced, and the War Machine rolls on.

I think this film is great for us at OCS because we can think about how we would handle similar situations. There is a scene where the General callously addresses a concern of one of his junior enlisted, failing to see how it might be a problem that subordinates do not understand the mission. In the film it also seems like the General also does not understand what his own mission is and what his boss expects from him. He assumed he was brought in to win the war, as most good Soldiers would in that role, but he was probably just meant to manage a situation seen as unwinnable. My final takeaway is to ensure I understand what my boss expects of me, perhaps by back-briefing my boss during our initial meeting.

Special thanks go to OC William Mauro, OC Tayler Hildebrandt, OC Matthew Todd, OC Charles Dozal, OC Sandra Santos, OC Edward McFadden, OC Austin Weigel, and OC Charles Foster for their writing, editing, and photo contributions to the May 2024 issue of the OCS Newsletter.

Photo credit(s): War Machine (www.wikipedia.org); The Women (www.thirftbooks.com).