

# Inspiration in Binghamton

## CAP Cadet Responds to Fatal Shooting Scene

By Mitzi Palmer

A normal week for most teenagers usually consists of learning the daily curriculum at school, spending a few hours at a part-time job and maybe attending the Friday night game. But for Maine-Endwell High School senior, volunteer emergency medical technician and Civil Air Patrol Cadet 2nd Lt. Brian Conner, the week of March 31 was far from normal.

By Friday, April 3, Conner had already responded to a double fatal car fire and attended a fellow paramedic's funeral, and he was now on his way to the American Civic Association in Binghamton, N.Y., where gunman Jiverly Wong was in the midst of a shooting spree.

More than 22 ambulances were called to the scene that day. Conner's unit was the 17th.

"While en route, we were getting

Cadet 2nd Lt. Brian Conner plans to parlay his volunteer work for CAP and as an EMT into a career in public service.

reports that anywhere from four to 20 were already dead and that the shooter was still alive and could possibly go after us," said Conner. "It was really stressful and extremely chaotic."

Sadly, the final number of fatalities — 14, including the gunman — outweighed the number of injured. So for almost four hours, Conner and the rest of the EMS team remained on standby ready to assist those in need of medical attention. They used a church just a few buildings away from the immigration services center as a barricade from the shooter.

Conner, 18, says the skills he has learned in Civil Air Patrol helped him more than anything that Friday.

"CAP has instilled in me discipline, tact and self-control," he said.

Even at a young age, Conner knew he wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. But it wasn't until 2004, after he began his CAP service in the New York



Conner, left, is pictured with fellow EMT Eric Corwin.



Photo by Cadet Tech. Sgt. Beverly Martin, New York Wing

Wing's Broome Tioga Composite Squadron, that he knew he wanted to be involved in ambulance and fire services.

"CAP complemented my interest in flying and anything involving airplanes, but what really hooked me were the program's tradition and the type of cadets it produces," said Conner. "CAP changed my entire look on life."

The Broome Tioga squadron's commander, Lt. Col. Richard Bohman, has witnessed Conner's CAP involvement.

"Cadet Conner is the kind of cadet that makes a unit proud," Bohman said. "He began showing commitment and community spirit early in his membership, and it continues to grow each year."

In the past five years, Conner has completed one type "A" encampment and two years at the Maryland-based CAP Honor Guard Academy and has already been accepted to attend the academy for the third time this summer. He has also participated in wreath-laying ceremonies as well as search and rescue missions, mentored new cadets and taught a handful of emergency service classes.

"Brian is a trusted and self-starting leader, and he has a surprising level of humility for someone his age," said Maj. William Shafer, squadron deputy commander of cadets. "With all he has done, it still takes a bit of digging to find out how deeply this young man is involved. He enriches not only the CAP program but also inspires the lives he touches in his community."

Conner is currently a Level 3 ground team member, an active field medic and a representative on the Group Cadet Advisory Council for his squadron. In addition to serving as a certified volunteer EMT for the Union Volunteer Emergency Squad and the Endwell Fire Department, he has also logged more than 2,600 hours of community service since 2005. He also works part-time at a local grocery store.

To pay tribute to the lives lost in Binghamton, Conner is now in the process of organizing an annual flag retirement ceremony in his community.

Looking to the future, he wishes to be a paid firefighter and flight medic.

Conner will begin his first semester this fall at the State University of New York, Canton, where he will study emergency management.

"Because of CAP, I have become who I am today," said Conner. "I owe it all to my squadron." ▲



Fourteen people, including the gunman, were pronounced dead at the American Civic Association in Binghamton, N.Y.

## Cadet Conner's Milestones

- Joined CAP in September 2004.
- Named color guard commander and earned Wright Brothers Award in August 2006.
- Joined Union Volunteer Emergency Squad in December 2006.
- Joined Endwell Fire Department in February 2007.
- Began serving as drill instructor in April 2007.
- Named ground team medic in June 2007.
- Completed first year of service in National Honor Guard Academy and became certified first responder in July 2007.
- Received firefighter certification in February 2008.
- Graduated Broome County Smoke Divers/Mask Confidence Course in March 2008.
- Named squadron flight sergeant in April 2008.
- Completed second year of service in National Honor Guard Academy in July 2008.
- Named squadron executive officer in August 2008.
- Qualified for ground team member and received firefighter survival certification in October 2008.
- Received EMT certification in December 2008.