

# Best Of The Best

## National Cadet Competition Inspires Excellence

Photo by Susan Robertson, CAP National Headquarters



Members of the Southeast Region drill team, led by Cadet Maj. Luis Colon, stand at attention. They were victorious in this year's NCC.

*By Kimberly L. Wright*

For more than 160 U.S. Civil Air Patrol cadets nationwide, the journey to the 2007 National Cadet Competition didn't just begin with boarding a plane or van for the trip to Ohio. It represented the culmination of months and months of hard work, a journey of dedication and sacrifice.

NCC is more than a mere competition pitting team against team. Although only the Southeast Region drill team and the Southwest Region color guard could hoist the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff's award trophy as champions at the competition's end, all participants took away something valuable from the event. The NCC experience reinforced values and skills emphasized in the CAP Cadet Program — with leadership and excellence put

to the test in the team drills, color guard posting events, aerospace and science panel quizzes, written test, in-rank inspection, mile run and volleyball competition.

Sixteen teams traveled to Dayton, Ohio — one four-person color guard and one 13-person drill team from each of CAP's eight regions. They were rewarded for challenging themselves to achieve their personal best by demonstrating, in settings ripe with history, why they are the best of the best.

The competition was held June 28-July 1 at Wright State University, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force and Sinclair Community College.

### **Dedication and sacrifice**

Cadets earned the right to compete nationally by winning their wing and regional competitions. Cadet Sponsor Member Leslie Lazo, mother of Pacific Region Color Guard Cadet Commander Master Sgt. Elena Lazo and Senior Airman Ariana Lazo, said practice for the NCC "started shortly after the 2006 competition and became more frequent as this year's showdown drew closer."

The competition was a family affair, with parents, grandparents and siblings traveling to Dayton to support the team.

Cadets pushed the limits of space and time to train. Master Sgt. Hannah Krueger of the South Dakota Wing, a member of the North Central Region drill team,

noted, "We've been practicing about once a month, spending a weekend together, just working all day for about three days. It takes away time from other activities, but it's been worth it for me."

2nd Lt. Christina Cassabaum of the Arizona Wing, a member of the Southwest Region drill team, detailed the headaches her team faced just to practice. "We all live in different cities, so we had to travel up to 300-450 miles, depending on where we were practicing. That takes a long time," she said.

In addition, preparing for in-ranks inspection required extreme attention to detail. Southeast Region Color Guard Cadet Commander Master Sgt. John Gramke of the Florida Wing said, "In just preparing our shoes, we spent I don't know how many hours over an entire day. The other day we spent probably 10 hours cleaning and pressing our competition shirts."

NCC participants ranged from veterans to rookies. The Utah Wing color guard, which represented the Rocky Mountain Region, elicited cheers from its peers, who appreciated the long odds the team overcame to compete at NCC.

The Utah Wing made the nationals without the benefit of a coach. "We've had to find out about

all of the regulations on our own," said Staff Sgt. Jooyoung Lim. "This is our first time going to wing competition, the first time going to regional competition and the first time going to nationals. It's pretty cool we made it this far." Utah Wing Commander Col. Robert Bost said, "I am their wing commander, and I didn't even see it coming."

### **Inspiration and perspiration**

Venues for the competition included the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, where cadets performed drill routines and faced inspection in the company of large planes and historical displays, and Huffman Prairie Field, where runners raced at the site where Wilbur and Orville Wright perfected flight. The temperate, sunny Ohio summer provided perfect weather for the mile run. Cadets cheered each other, disregarding team affiliations in favor of recognizing their common bond as cadets.

With every step of the competition,

## **2007 NCC Sponsors**

- Sinclair Community College (Dayton, Ohio)
- Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
- National Museum of the U.S. Air Force
- National Park Service
- Wright State University (Dayton)
- Homewood Suites (Fairborn, Ohio)
- Sprint-NEXTEL
- Cintas First Aid (Cleveland)
- U.S. Air Force judges



Master Sgt.  
John Gramke



1st Lt. Katie Ewing



Master Sgt.  
Elena Lazo



2nd Lt. Abby Black



Staff Sgt.  
Jooyoung Lim

the cadets knitted more closely together. Staff Sgt. Julian Davila of the New Hampshire Wing, a member of the Northeast Region drill team, developed a rapport with fellow CAP cadets from across the country. “You become friends with them and you learn about different cultures, different people and different personalities,” he said.

Middle East Region Drill Team Cadet Commander 1st Lt. Katie Ewing of the Delaware Wing, a fourth-year NCC competitor, shared the effect NCC has had on her. “Civil Air Patrol has given me a lot of self-discipline and a whole lot of character. It’s made me the person I am,” said Ewing. “With the drill team, you have to be sharp, and that’s something you have to be every day in a workplace.”

Drill team cadets exercised their creativity by coming up with routines for innovative drill, a favorite drill team event. Pacific Region Drill Team Cadet Commander 2nd Lt. Abby Black of the Washington Wing took inspiration from an unexpected

place — a math class. “My older brother, who was a drill team commander as well, told me to think up shapes first, so part of our innovative drill is to make a sinusoidal graph. I was sitting in math class one day, and it was just like, hey, how awesome would it be to make a sinusoidal graph at innovative?”

Other sources of inspiration cited by cadets included ROTC routines, previous competitions and cheer-leading routines. “Our coach used

to plot out our innovative moves on a chess board,” said Ewing.

Color guard teams are faced with a significant duty — the proper care and handling of the American flag in a variety of situations, whether marching or posting the colors. “I think it’s a great opportunity we have as cadets to participate on a color guard,” said Chief Master Sgt. Ben Dilley of the Nebraska Wing, North Central Region color guard cadet commander. “We have the



Photo by Susan Robertson, CAP National Headquarters

The North Central Region drill team undergoes inspection, where their attention to detail is evaluated.

opportunity to carry the flag, march in different events and ultimately honor our veterans who have provided us with freedom.”

The NCC staff, largely made up of former cadets, also upheld the cadet tradition of excellence by going above and beyond the call of duty in their support roles. When a ground incident caused the Pacific Region drill team’s flight to be canceled the day before the competition, it threatened the team’s ability to compete, because taking the next available flight would have caused them to miss the first day. 1st Lt. Thomas Rehman and Capt. Andrew Shepherd, both of the Ohio Wing, found that unacceptable. “It would just offend my sense of fairness if they got sidelined by something that wasn’t even their fault,” said Rehman.

After several calls, Rehman and Shepherd obtained a full airfare refund from United Airlines, as well as a flight on Southwest Airlines that allowed the drill team to make the competition on time, at a discount of more than \$2,000 from the cost of the original fare.

How did they pull it off? “I think it was a combination of knowing how airlines operate from my work experience, Tom’s salesmanship when he was working with Southwest and many kindhearted people at both Southwest and United Airlines who were willing to help out the team,” said Shepherd. “I can’t say enough about how great Southwest and United Airlines were.” ▲

# COS Cadets Unite to Become Leaders

*By Neil Probst*

The fall briefly knocked the air from Cadet Capt. Daniel Bracken’s lungs. He quickly shook the shock, but the jolt will always remind him of U.S. Civil Air Patrol’s Cadet Officer School.

“We didn’t really work as a team very well on that obstacle. The pole wasn’t in the socket all the way, so it slipped off,” said the New Mexico Wing cadet.

Bracken and 116 other CAP cadets survived Project X, a series of challenges that tested their ability to overcome adversity as a team.

The obstacles are the property of Squadron Officer College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, and the cadets endured training that Air Force captains themselves face.

Many youth, like Cadet 2nd Lt. Tyler Dimock of the Wyoming Wing, enjoyed the idea of scaling mock minefields.



Photo by Susan Robertson, CAP National Headquarters

Dr. John Kline, acclaimed author on interpersonal communications, speaks to cadets at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Ala. Kline was among a dozen guest lecturers who spoke to COS students about different expectations of leaders.