



THE DET 520 DISPATCH

A resource for alumni, parents and supporters

DETACHMENT NEWSLETTER — OCTOBER 2026

Greetings from Det 520!

Detachment 520 had a busy September! As the first full month of instruction, cadets are settling into the rhythm of balancing AFROTC with their academics. New cadets are becoming accustomed to the program, while returning cadets are adjusting to new roles and responsibilities. Several events outside of regular training also took place this month, including a 9/11 memorial workout, the Air Force Birthday celebration, the first Field Training Exercise of the year, Leadership Reaction Courses, and the Watchfire event. Many of these events were spent with the Joint Services Brigade, which includes all of Cornell's ROTC programs: Air Force ROTC, Army ROTC, and Navy ROTC.

9/11 Memorial Workout

On September 11th, Detachment 520 joined the rest of the Joint Services Brigade, local first responders, veterans, Cornell University staff, and other volunteers in honoring the memory of those who lost their lives on 9/11. Participants completed a memorial workout consisting of calisthenics, a buddy carry, and stair runs at Schoellkopf Field. The workout was followed by remarks from the Brigade Commander, Midshipman Li, and the Navy ROTC Commander, Captain Mosbruger.



Cadets from the Joint Service Brigade and other participants listen to Captain Mosbruger, NROTC Commander, after completing the 9/11 Memorial Workout.

Watchfire

Detachment 520 joined the Vietnam Veteran's Association (VVA) Chapter 377 and the rest of the Joint Services Brigade to commemorate National Prisoner of War and Missing in Action Recognition Day. The day was memorialized with speeches, a rendition of "American Soldier" by Lisa LaDieu, and the lighting of a Watchfire. The significance of a Watchfire goes back to ancient times, in which a large fire would be lit so that lost and wounded soldiers would be able to find their comrades-in-arms. With the VVA dissolving in NY state, this was among the last Watchfires to be run by the VVA, but the tradition will continue with the support of local charitable organizations and the Cornell ROTC Brigade.





VVA member gives a speech on remembering fallen and lost comrades.



C/Maria stands in front of the Watchfire as it slowly burns out.

Air Force Birthday PT

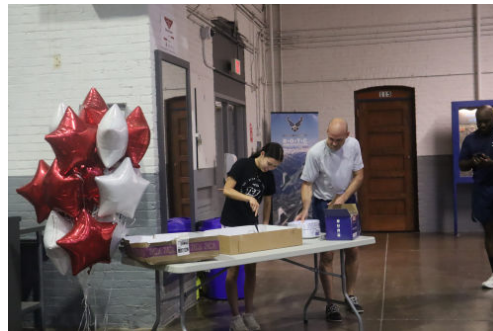
On September 18th, Cornell's Air Force and Navy ROTC detachments came together for a joint PT session to celebrate the Air Force's 79th birthday (the service was founded on September 18, 1947). Cadets from both detachments were split into mixed teams for several rounds of ultimate frisbee, alongside a calisthenics and running station. Afterward, cadets heard from Medal of Honor recipient and retired Army Lieutenant Colonel William Swenson, who offered words of advice and answered their questions. The session wrapped up with the traditional cutting of the cake in honor of the Air Force's birthday.



Medal of Honor recipient Lt. Col. (Ret.) William Swenson speaks to cadets from Cornell's Air Force and Navy ROTC detachments.



C/Marino scans the field for an open teammate during ultimate frisbee.



Keeping with tradition, C/Clark, the detachment's youngest cadet, makes the first cut of the birthday cake.

Leadership Reaction Course (LRC) Highlights

On September 24th, cadets traveled to Mount Pleasant to participate in Leadership Reaction Courses (LRCs). Focusing on taking leadership and problem solving lessons in a more fluid and realistic environment, LRCs provide valuable learning experiences for both upperclassmen and underclassmen. Adaptability is the key to airpower, and LRCs provide the opportunity to lead, follow, and adapt on the fly.



Cadets jogging in formation through Mount Pleasant.



C/Guttman and C/Davis navigate the Green Pipe LRC.

Field Training Exercise (FTX)

Det 520 closed out September with its first Field Training Exercise (FTX) of the year at Mount Pleasant. Upperclassmen were responsible for organizing and evaluating the exercise, as well as role-playing civilians and enemy forces. Meanwhile, underclassmen were tasked with limiting enemy activity and protecting friendly forces.

Following safety and intelligence briefings, cadets were assigned to defend three isolated bases. Throughout the exercise, they practiced essential skills, including communicating over the radio under challenging conditions, following medical evacuation and explosive ordnance reporting procedures, establishing and managing entry control points, and reporting enemy activity using SALUTE reports. The exercise culminated in a movement from the last remaining base to a designated safe point, during which underclassmen were ambushed by a barrage of enemy paintballs. Despite the ambush, cadets persisted and successfully reached their destination. Many freshmen also had their first experience eating a Meal, Ready-to-Eat (MRE) during the exercise.

Special thanks to all the upperclassmen who brought the FTX to life, particularly C/Gerst and C/Marino for their efforts in planning and leading the exercise.



Cadets haul supplies toward the designated safe point during the exercise's final movement.



C/A. Cao and C/Davis stand guard at an entry control point.



C/Dutta and C/A. Gentile call in a 9-line medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) request.

Cadet Spotlight: Cadet Jack Chaney



Meet C/Chaney, a senior studying Electrical and Computer Engineering and Detachment 520's Training Group Commander. After graduation, he will commission into the Air Force as a pilot. Inspired by his family's history of military service, he joined AFROTC to become the first officer in his family while earning a top-tier education at Cornell through an HSSP scholarship.

Coming from a family with a history of military service, C/Chaney chose AFROTC with the goal of becoming the first officer in his family, and his HSSP scholarship has allowed him to pursue that goal while earning a top-tier education at Cornell. Looking ahead, he hopes to attend Test Pilot School and eventually serve as a military test pilot. This past summer, he interned in San Diego through the Griffiss Institute's VICEROY program. Outside of AFROTC, C/Chaney enjoys lifting, running, hunting, and fishing. His advice to underclassmen: "Be wise in how you divide your time between studies, military training, and extracurriculars. Have fun and learn!"

Alumni Spotlight: John Pedro



"If it doesn't compound, don't do it," is the advice John Pedro '17 gives to future officers in the Air Force and Space Force. After commissioning, John served as an Intelligence Officer and Combat Aviation Advisor in Air Force Special Operations Command, leading teams of up to 90 and later deploying to Central America. His work exposed him early to the challenges of making good decisions with imperfect information, coordinating across the interagency, and putting emerging technology in the hands of operators.

After leaving active duty amid COVID and a restructuring of AFSOC, John earned an MBA from Harvard Business School and began a civilian career focused on the intersection of artificial intelligence and national security. At Anduril he worked on policy issues for the Global Defense Team, later led implementation work at Palantir across the Department of War, and most recently joined Anthropic, where his work focuses on helping large complex institutions across industries like energy, manufacturing, and infrastructure.

Some of John's favorite memories from Det 520 are the informal ones: all nighters to write an essay in the hangar, or playing pool with the other cadets in his class, many of whom remain among his closest friends today. That experience also shaped the lesson behind his advice to younger officers. Whether in physical training, education, professional development, or personal relationships, John believes the highest-value investments are the ones that build on themselves over time. Direction is more important than speed, but once you know you're heading in the right direction, the goal is not simply to compound improvement, but to improve the rate at which you do so.

September Warrior Wingmen of the Month



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AFROTC Detachment 520

Cornell University

