

# Field Artillery

## through the eyes of a Cadet Troop Leadership Cadet

By CDT Elisabetta Aversa, CDT Henry Jensen, and CDT Kendall Elms

If the Army ages its Soldiers, then the youthful, somewhat naive perspective of a cadet under the Cadet Troop Leadership (CTLT) program is a rarity. Upon stepping foot on Fort Sill, we, a small group of Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and West Point cadets, began shadowing our respective lieutenants in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment (2-4<sup>th</sup> FAR). We were startled at the expertise and maturity shown by the officers whose roles we would fill in only a year or two. As fully-fledged platoon leaders, they were immersed in the culture of the unit and the intricacies of planning, maintenance, and supervision. Over three weeks, we followed them everywhere—conducting Preventative Maintenance Checks and Services of vehicles, attending morning physical training, and riding in the Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS). Yet, the difference in understanding and perspective was glaring. As cadets, the world of Field Artillery (FA) lay new and complicated before us. Despite this difference in knowledge, the challenge that the gap in understanding and maturity posed to us was refreshing rather than unnerving. The unit energy, importance of FA, and the prospect of FA Officer positions guided our CTLT experience to only encourage us to branch FA.

### Unit Energy

Between the refined West Point environment and the civilian-military duality of ROTC, none of the cadets were well-versed in active-duty, enlisted Army culture—much less the high-spirits and motivation with which 2-4<sup>th</sup> FAR navigated their tasks. We were pleasantly surprised to find a unit that cared about their job and fellow Soldiers. We soon discovered that the branch culture of FA differed from the other combat arms branches we previously interacted with. Instead of a cutthroat, rugged

*Sidebar: U.S. Army photo by SGT Henry Villarama, 173rd Airborne Brigade. Above: CDT Elisabetta Aversa (USMA) utilizes her PVS-14 night vision device to survey platoon night operations conducted at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Cadets attached to Alpha Battery, 2nd Battalion 4th Field Artillery, had the opportunity to observe MLRS platoon-level training, including Troop Leading Procedures, Convoy Briefs, and Night Drivers Training.*



environment, we observed a culture that lifted Soldiers and empowered them to be effective team members. Instances like mandatory personal point-of-contact worksheets, command climate surveys, and interpersonal exchanges between Soldiers proved that the Army truly is a people-first business. Knowing the culture of FA is motivating, high-speed, and high intensity makes the prospect of leading FA units more exciting.

### King of Battle

Observing the FA branch units under field conditions presented a different appeal—weapons systems. On the gun line and downrange, we observed the capabilities of artillery cannons and rocket systems and their effects, all conducted at high speeds and even higher levels of efficiency by their operators. The Fire Direction Center and weapon system operators worked in perfect harmony to showcase the strength of the FA to destroy the enemy. The situation of modern

combat presents itself as a combined-arms fight, and the addition of artillery to small-unit tactics and light units creates a deadly force—our time sending rounds downrange and calling for fire verified that. Between both rocket and cannon missions, the unique benefits of each weapon system reinforced the value of a combined-arms fight with varied FA weapons. We learned the MLRS unit's mission differs from the cannon units by their significant importance at the Division and Corps-level fight: the strategic door kickers of the Army. Ultimately, both asset types are needed to help support maneuver forces that dominate the battlefield.

### Officer Life

The prospects of becoming an officer, while already positive, are bolstered when considering joining the FA team. In addition to the typical platoon leadership time, we learned the FA branch is invested in developing well-rounded lieutenants



*CDT Henry Jenson (USMA) participates in an observed fire exercise at Observation Post Arbuckle on Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The cadets received a rare opportunity to not only observe Field Artillery Basic Officer Leader Course Lieutenants conduct a Call for Fire but were able to assist in spotting indirect rounds and use a Lightweight Laser Designator Rangefinder to acquire targeting data.*



*CDT Kendall Elms (ROTC) loads a 105 mm round for 2nd Battalion, 2nd Field Artillery at Firing Point 103 on Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Though assigned to 2nd Battalion, 4th Field Artillery (MLRS), cadets received exposure to cannon operations and helped participate in their live-fire exercise.*



by placing them in Fire Support Officer or Fire Direction Officer positions. By occupying each position, the goal is to gain experiences to improve our artillery-related skills and ability to fulfill later roles and responsibilities successfully. Thus, the precious early years of officer life are more varied and valuable.

## Conclusion

Our experiences as CTLT cadets filled a critical window of time in our lives—young, impressionable, and still developing many of the skills necessary to work as an acting lieutenant. The FA showcased what a positive officer example should be. The varied aspects of unit energy and cohesion, mission-oriented weapons systems, and officership within the FA branch influenced us to pursue the branch for our careers. Through our observations as cadets, we know what to work on between our cadet time and commissioning to match the expectation of our prospective units. Though our futures direct us toward the career of a seasoned, well-versed officer on the beaten path of experience, our lack of understanding and impressionability creates FA to be an untraveled path entirely new to us. With this in mind, CTLT gave us an eye-opening experience, working to meet a future career as a FA Officer.

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*Cadets participate in platoon night operations and cannon and live-fire exercises conducted at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.*

