

DECEMBER 2023

# BEARKAT BATTALION

## NEWSLETTER



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### EAT 'EM UP KATS!

Congratulations to the Sam Houston ROTC Cadets for successfully completing the fall semester at Sam Houston State University! In this month's newsletter check out some kind words from passed coworkers, friends and Cadets to Mr. Darryl Derr for his years of service; his retirement marks the end of an era, and we appreciate his unwavering commitment to the ROTC program. Hear a few words from our Professor of Military Science, Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Limberg, and as always a word from one of our alumni. Read about our fall 2023 Awards Ceremony and see what branches our MS4 Cadets received during our Branch Reveal Ceremony. Hear from our Cadet of the month, Micheal Kilgore, and see who are our newest contracted Cadets. Happy holidays and have a great winter break Cadets and we look forward to welcoming you all back in the spring 2024 semester!



**Happy Thanksgiving Bearkats!**  
Receive a glimpse of the Cadets  
with their families!!

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Read about Mr. Darryl Derr's  
retirement ceremony and the  
appreciative messages Cadets and  
friends have for him

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# Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Limberg

## END OF THE SEMESTER REMARKS

Another semester gone by! The end of every semester is always exciting and hectic; especially the fall semester where we find out what branches and components our senior Cadets are receiving. The branching process for Cadets is based on their order of merit list number. This OML number is determined by their cumulative efforts in ROTC, their academics, and their performance at Cadet Summer Training. They also conduct interviews with the branches to determine their best fit and then they rank order their branch preferences. Then they wait while the Army determines their branches and components based on their OML score, their preferences, and the needs of the Army.

For our branch reveal ceremony this year we tried something a little different and modeled the ceremony off the NFL draft. We had walk up music, a joke telling MC, and a lot of flair to finally announce what branch and component they had earned. It was a great success and should be something the Cadets will remember for a long time as it was the culmination of a lot of hard work on their part. Thanks to our hardworking team lead by Cadet Haley Davee and Ms. Britney Loerwald for their efforts in making the ceremony something bigger and more memorable.

We also said goodbye to Mr. Darryl Derr, our Recruiting Operations Officer, who has been with the program for more than 15 years and had a part in the commissioning of over 260 Second Lieutenants. Darryl's impact on our program has been tremendous and he will be sorely missed.

Finally, we ended the semester with the contracting of three new Cadets into the BearKat family and the commissioning of four outstanding Officers. Our four new Second Lieutenants represent all three components (Active, National Guard, and Reserve) and their branches ranged from Operations, to Force Sustainment, to Health Services. What a great way to end a semester!

I look forward to next semester and all the things the Battalion will accomplish and I cannot wait to have them tell you all about it.

# Contracting Cadets

“RAISE YOUR RIGHT HAND”



**Cadet Matthew Traynor**



**Cadet Alejandro Florez**

I am excited for camp and I cannot wait to see what else the ROTC program has in store for the Spring Semester and my senior year here at Sam Houston State!

**Cadet Joshua Vogt**



**Cadet Joshua Vogt**

# Cadet of the Month

## MICHAEL KILGORE

I am honored to be cadet of the month. With this semester being my first semester in ROTC, I have met some amazing people that helped me achieve this. This program has been very welcoming to me and I cannot wait to see what the rest of my time in ROTC has in store for me.

### Cadet Michael Kilgore



# Top Cadets of 2023

## BEST OF THE BEST



**MS1 Cadet of the Fall Semester: Chase Davis**



**MS2 Cadet of the Fall Semester: Alexander Cannon**



**MS3 Cadet of the Fall Semester: William Ratliff**

# Mr. Darryl Derr's Retirement

## A LEGACY OF COMMITMENT

I've seen the impact you have had on so many young men and women that decided to raise their right hand to swear to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies. Some folks learned leadership skills from your efforts and took those to the private sector. Others used the provided scholarships to gain an education that they might not had the opportunity otherwise or gave them the chance to focus on school instead of working job(s) to pay for school. Darryl, your impact on future generations of Army and private sector leaders is a testament to your character and values. I was blessed with your friendship and your wisdom during my quick stop at SHSU. I wish you blessings as you move on to the next phase of your life to enjoy your retirement.

**Lieutenant Colonel Chris Sherwood**

Mr. Derr! I really hope by reading these, you realize the level of impact you have had on each and every one of our lives. I have spoken to many ROTC graduates from schools across the nation, and none of them had such a knowledgeable, honest, PATIENT, and caring Recruiting Operations Officer. You are the reason that I, and peers, in the class of 2019 have gotten to where we are. We are so so grateful to have met you! I was fortunate enough to have met you as a brand new (timid/nervous) Private in the Texas Army National Guard in 2014. You had to put up with me (and my crazy split option timeline/ AIT and Airborne school) all the way through 2019. I am now in the CAPTAIN Career Course at Fort Sill Oklahoma as an Active-Duty Field Artillery Officer. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for you, and I am forever grateful!

**Capitan Leighanna Bridwell**

With the constant transition of military cadre over semesters and years, Mr. Derr's presence served as a source of continuity within the SHSU ROTC program. A few years ago, when cadet-based recruitment was not what it is today, Mr. Derr was often the first face from the program a prospective cadet had the privilege of being introduced to, myself included. His knowledge and belief in the success and impact of the SHSU ROTC program was evident from this first interaction and carried on through all four years of working with him. I am truly grateful for the support he has provided to not only myself but my classmates and the program as a whole, something that will continue to impact the program well past retirement. Thank you Mr. Derr for caring about each of us and our careers from start to finish!

**Capitan Caitlin K. Driscoll**



# Mr. Darryl Derr's Retirement

## THE END OF AN ERA

Thank you for beginning my journey of becoming an Army Officer. Four years ago, when I first visited Sam Houston, it was you who introduced me to the National Army ROTC Scholarship opportunity and encouraged me to apply. With your help and support, I was able to earn the scholarship and begin my path in ROTC and the Army. I truly appreciate all the work you do and have done for all of us, and I wish you the best in your future and that you enjoy your well-earned retirement.

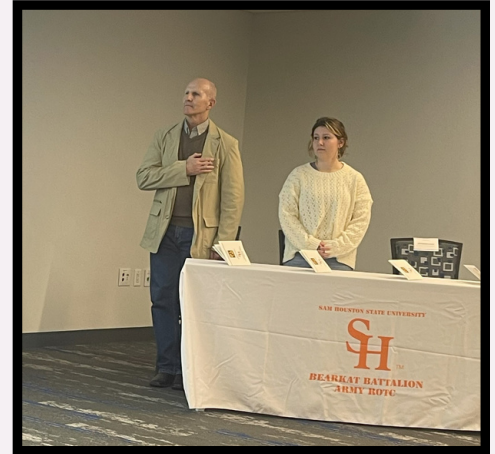
### Cadet Nicholas Watson

The first person I ever talked to was Mr. Derr, even before I joined ROTC or the National Guard. In all of my experiences, he has been a genuine and kind person who has always helped me and my peers. In spite of the many questions and issues I have brought to him, he has never complained. Without him, the program will be without a kind and generous leader. Over the years, he has impacted a number of cadets, and he will be missed by all of them. I appreciate everything you've done for me, Mr. Derr!

### Cadet Avery Sitkowski

Mr. Derr, thank you so much for your dedication to the future cadets, cadets and now commissioned officers that came from the Sam Houston State ROTC program. You have impacted the lives of so many and made many dreams happen.

### First Lieutenant Courtney Paulson



# Fall 2023 Awards Ceremony

## SCHOLARSHIPS & RECOGNIZATION



**The Team Player Awardees**



**Top Male ACFT Awardees**



**Top Female ACFT Awardees**



**Push-Up Crew Awardees**



**Best Mentor Awardees**

Congratulations to the ROTC cadets for their exceptional dedication and hard work throughout the Fall 2023 semester. Their commitment to excellence and tireless efforts have undoubtedly contributed to the success of the program. It is with great pride that the Program recognizes Cadets for their unwavering determination and the values they embody as future leaders. Furthermore, congratulations to the winners of the Fall 2023 ROTC Awards Ceremony. Their outstanding achievements and noteworthy performances have set a standard for their peers. May this recognition serve as a testament to their leadership, discipline, and exemplary service. As they continue their journey into the Spring 2024 semester, know that their efforts are truly appreciated, and we look forward to witnessing the upcoming continued success and growth in the semesters to come. Well done, and congratulations once again!



# Fall Intramural League

## BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Cadet Intramural League (CIL) program was developed to build cohesion outside of normal ROTC activities and changes every semester based on the sports preferences of the Cadets. This year they selected basketball and after a semester long season and the playoffs concluded, we were left with two finalists – Dunkin’ Donuts and JumpTeam6. Competing in front of the whole battalion Dunkin’ Donuts came out on top as this semester’s CIL Champions. Congratulations to all the teams that participated and to the top two teams who received scholarships for their hard work and dedication! We look forward to seeing what the Cadets select for next semester and who will be crowned the champion!



Both teams after the finals



Team Dunkin’ Donuts wins the game!



Team Dunkin’ Donuts



Team JumpTeam6



The final game in action

# Thanksgiving Break

## GOBBLE, GOBBLE



**Cadet Joseph Bozic and his girlfriend visiting home in Alabama.**



**Cadet Katelyn Nitsche enjoying a Thanksgiving feast with her mother, aunt, and grandmother.**



**Cadet Emily Kehoe and her family gathered together for Thanksgiving.**



**Cadet Cailyn Whitner and his family celebrating Thanksgiving.**

# Fall 2023 Branch Reveal

## TO NEW BEGINNINGS

Congratulations to the outstanding Sam Houston State ROTC MS4 and MS5 Cadets on achieving remarkable results in their branch assignments! Your dedication, discipline, and commitment have truly paid off, and it is with great pride that we extend our heartfelt congratulations on this significant accomplishment. The future leaders you have become through your hard work and perseverance are a testament to the excellence of the ROTC program at Sam Houston State University. As you embark on this new chapter in your military careers, may you continue to embody the values of honor, courage, and commitment. Your chosen branches are fortunate to have such a talented and dedicated group of individuals, and we have no doubt that you will excel in every endeavor. Best wishes as you move forward with confidence and determination in service to our nation!



**Cadet Elaine Bishop  
receiving Active Duty  
Medical Services**



**Cadet Rashaad Hammond  
receiving United States Army  
Reserves**



**Cadet Cory Morrison  
receiving National Guard  
Armor**

# Fall 2023 Branch Reveal

## CONTINUED



Cadet Cinthia Salinas receiving Active Duty Adjutant General, with branch detail to the Chemical Corps



Cadet Kynnyth LeBlanc receiving Active Duty Military Police



Cadet Cinnamon Wright-Burwinkel receiving Active Duty Armor



Cadet Nicholas Watson receiving Active Duty Infantry



Cadet Ryan Coker receiving National Guard Infantry



Cadet Emily Slott receiving Active Duty Armor

# Fall 2023 Branch Reveal

## CONTINUED



**Cadet Emmett Gray receiving Active Duty Quartermaster**



**Cadet Arly Cruz-Flores receiving Active Duty Quartermaster**



**Cadet Bethany Mitchell receiving the United States Army Reserves**



**Cadet Carson Shell receiving Active Duty Field Artillery**



**Cadet Faith Calma receiving the United States National Guard**



**Cadet Mason Kizer receiving the United States Army Reserves**

# Fall 2023 Branch Reveal

## CONTINUED



Cadet Melissa Barrera receiving Active Duty and an acceptance to Explosive Ordnance Disposal



Cadet Michael Thille receiving Active Duty Air Defense Artillery



Cadet Isiah Galindo receiving Active Duty Field Artillery



Cadet Jack Boucher receiving the United States Army Reserves



Cadet Bailey Pogue receiving Active Duty Military Intelligence



Cadet Avery Sitkowski receiving the United States National Guard

# Fall 2023 Commissioning Ceremony

## THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Congratulations to the newest Sam Houston State Second Lieutenants! In this semester’s commissioning ceremony, we commissioned 4 of our cadets to the rank of Second Lieutenant: Melissa Barrera, Elaine Bishop, Destiny Mendez, and Bethany Mitchell.

This marks a significant milestone in their journey, and their dedication to the principles of leadership, integrity, and service is truly commendable. As they step into their roles as commissioned officers, remember that they are not only carrying the weight of responsibility but also the pride of achievement. Their commitment and hard work throughout the years have prepared them well for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Embrace this moment with a sense of accomplishment, knowing that your efforts have not gone unnoticed.

The Sam Houston State ROTC community is proud to celebrate your success, and we have every confidence that they will continue to embody the values instilled during their time in the program. Congratulations on this well-deserved achievement, and best wishes for a successful and fulfilling career in service to our nation!



**Second Lieutenant Bethany Mitchell giving our guest speaker, LTC (R) Tim Campbell, an award**



**Left to Right: Second Lieutenants Destiney Mendez, Bethany Mitchell, Elaine Bishop, and Melissa Barrera**



**Newly Sworn-In Second Lieutenants**



**Second Lieutenant Destiney Mendez handing her first salute a silver dollar**

# Alumni Spotlight

## AUSTIN ZIRKEL

Bearkat family, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Second Lieutenant Austin Zirkel. I grew up in Medina, Texas, and was recruited to run Track and Field/Cross Country at Sam Houston State University. In my senior year of high school, I was awarded the National 4-Year ROTC Scholarship, which allowed me to join the Bearkat Battalion in the fall of 2018. As a cadet, I learned the basics of the Army and leadership. My experiences in ROTC helped create a smooth transition to life as a 2LT.

In May 2022, I was commissioned as an Active-Duty Military Police Officer. I attended Basic Officer Leader's Course (BOLC) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where I learned my branch specifications. The Bearkat Battalion prepared me exceptionally well for writing and briefing OPORDs; my brief during our field cycle was ranked among the top in my class. After BOLC, I traveled to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, where I started as an Assistant S3. During this time, I created training products and quickly learned that I needed to become proficient in the ins and outs of Microsoft. After assisting our Battalion S3 for a few months, I became Platoon Leader for 1st Platoon, 67th Military Police Company (Detention). When I took over, half of the platoon was deployed in Iraq. The platoon returned shortly after I took over, and it has been a whirlwind of tremendous but hectic experiences as a Platoon Leader. Military Police platoons are unique because our Soldiers are separated due to work shift cycles. My Soldiers specifically work in a Military Prison, with our sister Battalion working field cycles and road obligations. Because of this, I have yet to have a time when all my Soldiers are in the same place. However, I have had the opportunity to work on the road, go to the field, and work in the Northwestern Joint Regional Correctional Facility (NWJRCF) with my Soldiers, which creates trust and builds a shared understanding of the work that we do together.

Mentoring and developing Soldiers is one of my most valued parts of being a Platoon Leader. I encourage upperclassmen cadets to build this skill by helping MS1s and MS2s thrive in the program. Learning these leadership skills is of the utmost importance, as is the ability to learn from those above you. I advise future officers to lean hard into their work duties and give all they can to their Soldiers while remaining grounded in the things and people they love. Set an example for your Soldiers and show them with your actions, reinforced by your words.

Very Respectfully,

Austin R. Zirkel  
Second Lieutenant, Military Police  
Platoon Leader  
1/67 Military Police Company  
Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA

