

I entered and exited the 2019 Encampment as a completely different person. A month into summer break, I found myself taking part in a disciplinary boot camp. A week away from my parents, surrounded by new people, and without my prized possession: my phone. I had people shouting at me from the moment I arrived and had to march long distances in the summer heat. How did I, a reserved and nerdy teenager, end up in a rigorous military camp? A year earlier, I joined the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), a civilian auxiliary of the US Air Force, and I needed to attend Encampment to advance to the next rank. I never realized how much more than just a promotion requirement this trip would mean to me. I learned how to listen to directions, work as a team, and be open to trying new things.

Discipline was a key lesson for us cadets and we practiced this by keeping our barracks clean and organized. There were set rules on how our rooms must be kept in the morning and we were graded on how well our rooms matched the expectations. I was up for the challenge. Every day, I remembered to line up my shoes along the wall, keep my clothes hung at equal intervals, and make my bed without any wrinkles. I made sure to fix anything I got wrong and improve my score the next day. Then on the final day of the camp, I walked down the long hallway and saw listed on my door: 25 out of 25. This boosted my confidence in my ability to follow directions. It also taught me how I can achieve anything I put my mind to and I will carry this mindset for the future.

Although it built an independent personality, the camp was focused on creating a team experience. All the cadets were placed in groups called flights. Even though we were complete strangers, my flight looked out for each other and took on challenges as a team. Every evening, we played volleyball between the several flights. Having played cricket for 6 years, I was used to competing in a sports team. I am a competitive person and got very involved in every single

round. We helped each other along the way and I encouraged my teammates to keep fighting even when we were losing. Many of us were new to volleyball but our team coordination helped us win round after round. I learned the importance of being able to work well with new people. This skill will definitely help me for the rest of my student career and will be essential for my future job.

Since Encampment was a part of the CAP, we participated in many aerospace activities. One day, we had a lesson on rockets which reminded me of the time I won a bottle rocket building competition in a regional science olympiad. A few days later, I got the opportunity to ride in a military Chinook helicopter and pilot a Cessna plane. I was initially nervous and considered not taking part in the activities but changed my mind when I realized I would hardly get this chance again. Flying became one of the best things I have ever done. I loved the feeling of being free amongst the clouds and learning how to operate the plane was exciting. This taught me how getting out of your comfort zone can help find something you like.

Encampment was a tough but necessary journey that tuned my skills and personality. I was always a good student but the camp toughened me in nonacademic aspects and taught me general life lessons. The camp encouraged me to take on leadership roles in my CAP squadron and improved my overall character. I wish to apply this to college life and continue serving my community as best as I can.