In October 2016, Task Force (TF) Ripley hosted the annual regional Ranger Challenge competition at Camp Ripley, Minnesota. Task Force Ripley consists of schools from South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota. The Ranger Challenge competition is an opportunity for schools to “compete” with each other completing military tasks. In addition to a written examination where cadets test their Army knowledge, there are physical fitness drills and field exercises. The purpose of the Ranger Challenge Program is to:

- Challenge cadets in tough mental and physical competition.
- Enhance leader development.
- Develop team cohesion.
- Develop healthy competition among the battalions.
- Serve as a highly visible and dynamic recruiting and retention vehicle.

The USD ROTC Detachment fielded one team this year. The team was comprised of the top cadets in the Prairie Fire Cadet Battalion. The Ranger Challenge Team worked hard training for the event. They trained 4-5 times a week and quickly honed their physical fitness levels and military skills.

The TF Ripley Ranger Challenge competition took place Oct. 21-23, 2016. On Friday during the competition, the nine-person Ranger Challenge team successfully completed the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). Day two of the competition began with the cadets competing in the 10-kilometer road march before sunrise. Upon completion of the road march the team had 12 hours to successfully complete several events to include land navigation course, weapons assembly/disassembly, weapons simulation event, one rope bridge, hand grenade assault course, litter obstacle course and casualty evacuation mission. The successful completion of all the events in the allotted time required the cadets to use their critical thinking skills and plan out the most efficient and logical route that would set the conditions for the team to successfully complete all the events within 12 hours or less.

A hearty congratulations goes out to the USD ROTC Ranger Challenge team which included: Ashley Flood (team captain), Denis Verbovskiy, Cole Clemitson, Sam Powell, Jake Preble, John Boes, Curtis Weber, Jeremy Schuelke and Chris Cap. The team finished 6th place overall. After the Ranger Challenge competition, the team utilized the Army’s After Action Review (AAR) process to evaluate their training and have started planning for the next Ranger Challenge competition in October 2017.
**Combat Water Survival Training (CWST) Lab**

On Nov. 18, the USD cadets participated in their last leadership lab of the fall semester, Combat Water Survival Training. Cadets showed up bright and early with motivation, eagerness and a bit of fear to start their day. The first event cadets participated in consisted of the 25-meter swim with their full ACU and PT uniforms on. Next, cadets split into three groups to complete the round robin tasks.

In the first task, cadets were blindfolded and had to walk off a five meter high diving board while holding a rifle above their heads. For the second task, cadets had to jump into the pool wearing an LBV (load bearing vest) and while under water, take off the LBV before returning to the surface. If they were to remerge to the surface before the LBV is off, the cadet failed and had two more chances. The third task consisted of a 15 meter swim with a rifle held above of the water at all times while maintaining a side stroke. After the round robin tasks, cadets were required to tread water. During the first set, cadets had to do a continuous swim for 10 minutes. During the second set, cadets had to tread water for five minutes. All cadets passed their Combat Water Survival Training!

**Critical Thinking Lab**

On Sept. 16, cadets attended a critical thinking lab at the 4H building in Vermillion. The purpose of this lab was to prepare cadets for the Joint Field Training Exercise (JFTX) with South Dakota State University ROTC the following weekend. The MS IV cadets led classes that familiarized cadets with basic rifle marksmanship as well as basic patrolling operations.

Cadets were introduced to movement techniques and basic tactics with rifles. Another class was taught on combat life saving techniques and different procedures used to save injured soldiers on the battlefield. Next, cadets were taught how to assemble and disassemble an M-16A2 rifle and were familiarized with shooting positions and basic fundamentals of marksmanship. The MS IV cadets instructed the junior cadets on the five-paragraph Operations Order (OPORD). During the OPORD class, cadets developed their abilities to rapidly synthesize information and accurately communicate that information in the form of Troop Leading Procedures (TLP). Lastly, cadets were exposed to personal hygiene maintenance in the field and basic field craft techniques. All of these classes prepared cadets for follow-on training.
Greetings! Hope everyone enjoyed the fall and holiday season. First off, I would like to say thank you to all of the fantastic cadets of the Prairie Fire Cadet Battalion and their families. These cadets sacrifice a lot in order to prepare themselves physically and mentally for their road ahead, for which I am truly grateful. The University of South Dakota’s ROTC Detachment’s fall semester ended with 2LT Luke Crance (National Guard – Medical Services) and 2LT Alex Schnell (Active Duty Ordnance) receiving their commissions. Congratulations to these fine officers.

Additionally, we welcomed seven cadets into the Prairie Fire Cadet Battalion – congratulations to these cadets. We welcome MSG Bronson Etse (Senior Military Instructor [SMI]), coming to us from Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM), Washington. MSG Etse finished out his tour at JBLM as the first sergeant for 17 Fires Brigade. He has 21 years in the Army and a plethora of leadership experience. He specializes in field artillery. We are looking forward to having MSG Etse on our cadre team.

Yet to come in the latter half of the spring quarter is the annual military ball, field training exercise, combined field training exercise with South Dakota and North Dakota ROTC programs, commissioning and graduation ceremonies. While the senior military science cadets prepare for their first steps as second lieutenants, our junior cadets are busy preparing for advanced and basic camps at Fort Knox, Kentucky as well as cultural understanding and language proficiency programs, and Army Airborne and Air Assault Schools. These opportunities are an integral piece of the developmental process in cadets’ future careers as Army officers.

As we continue on our mission for creating exceptional leaders, next semester will consist of more leadership, physical fitness and adaptive character building opportunities in preparation for commissioning into the Army as second lieutenants. I would also like to extend my sincerest appreciation from our generous alumni and friends of the University of South Dakota. I am grateful of being apart this wonderful family and GO YOTES!

A Note to USD ROTC Alumni:
We continue to build an alumni network of all former members. We have Facebook and twitter accounts, which are continually updated with photos and information about our cadets. Feel free to drop us a note and let us know where you are if you are still in the force. If you are retired or left the Army, drop us a note and tell us what you are up to these days. We enjoy hearing from USD ROTC alumni! Be on the lookout for a USD ROTC alumni golf tournament tentatively scheduled for April 2017.

One of the CLDX consisted of rifle qualification with an M16 rifle, day land navigation and patrol base operations. Day two composed of many platoon STX lanes including: Ambush, React to Contact, and Key Leader Engagement (KLE). The MS III cadets were placed in various leadership roles within the element, such as squad leader, platoon sergeant and platoon leader. Overall, the CLDX experience was a valuable training experience for the cadets. It taught them to work with new cadets and adapt to new environments.
2016 Fall Graduates

The Prairie Fire Battalion is pleased to announce its newest commissioned officers into the military, 2LT Alex Schnell and 2LT Luke Crance. Both officers were mid-term graduates and commissioned on Dec. 9.

Schnell, from Vale, South Dakota, graduated with a degree in psychology and branched into the Army’s Ordnance corps. After finishing Ordnance Basic Officer Leadership Course, he will begin his first duty assignment in Germany.

Crance, from Timber Lake, South Dakota, graduated with a degree in biology and will enter the Army’s Medical Services Corps. He plans to remain in the South Dakota National Guard while he attends the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse-Mayo Gundersen Physician Assistant Program. The Prairie Fire Battalion is proud and honored to have work with these reputable, hardworking and dedicated individuals over the past four years. We wish you luck on your future endeavors!

Move-In Day/ Zero Week

On Aug. 19, the USD ROTC cadets assisted incoming freshman students with moving into the dorms. The cadets, utilizing their communication and engagement skills, interacted with the new students and welcomed them to USD and Vermillion. Later that day, cadets attended a bowling social at Howlers. Cadets bonded with the new freshmen cadets over food and laughs while bowling.

The following day the cadets met at the Beacom School of Business for presentations on USD ROTC and introductions to the cadre and other cadets. Breakfast was provided for everyone.

Following the initial session, Cadet (CDT) Talbert presented a safety brief on motorcycle safety and the wear of personal protective gear while riding. Upon completion of the initial briefings, the cadets attended a barbecue on the Burr House (ROTC Building) lawn. The senior cadets served burgers and brats to new students and their parents. The South Dakota National Guard provided a variety of games to include an obstacle course. These activities allowed for senior and returning cadets to interact with incoming freshman and possible future cadets.
The Prairie Fire Battalion would like to welcome its newest members: Cadets Ashley Flood, Sam Powell, Bailey Weavill, Grace Waters, Cody Gunther, Logan Bullard and Tera Hanson have all worked very hard this semester, earning positions as contracted cadets with University of South Dakota ROTC. Congratulations, cadets!

Leave a Lasting Impact

By donating to the SROTC Leadership Excellence fund, YOU are allowing us to fund many of the day-to-day functions of our great program! The cadets rely on your generous donations to help offset many of the costs associated with cadet events, such as the travel to competitions (Ranger Challenge and German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge) commissioning and award ceremonies, military ball, open house, guest speakers, event receptions as well as training equipment and events that would otherwise not be possible. We are most grateful for your generosity.

Please direct donations to the USD Foundation, P.O. Box 5555 Vermillion, SD 57069, or you may make a gift online at http://onwardsd.org/donate/rotc or http://www.usd.edu/arts-and-sciences/military-science/. For specific information, please contact the USD Foundation at 1-800-521-3575 or email usdfound@usdfoundation.org.

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Spring Events and Activities ‘17

Spring Semester Begins
January 9

ROTC Open House
January 21

Virtual Battle Analysis
February 4

First Aid Training Lab
February 8

Spring Break
March 3-12

Military Ball
March 25

Spring FTX
April 8-9

Easter Break
April 14-16

Combined Field Training Exercise, Camp Rapid South Dakota
April 20-23

Record APFT
April 28

USD Final Exams
May 1-5

2017 Spring Commissioning
May 5

USD 2017 Spring Graduation
May 6