

ROTC: Service begins just after graduation

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his airborne certification at Fort Benning, Ga. The certification is a three-week course that focuses on paratrooper training.

"Any time they pay you to jump out of airplanes ... it's awesome," Ruddell said of his experience.

He also trained with a 101st Airborne division artillery unit at Fort Campbell, Ky.

"You go to a unit and you shadow a lieutenant ... someone's job that you'll be doing in a matter of a year," Ruddell said. "Once there you're treated like a second lieutenant. Everybody salutes you, you're called 'sir' and everything else, and you work."

After all the training is done, the cadet's performance in training, class and campus activities is assessed and he or she is placed on a national "Order of Merit List." Those at the top of the list have the best shot at receiving the assignments they want. The top 20 percent on the Order of Merit List get the Distinguished Military Graduate award if their professor of military science recommends them.

The workload has been stressful at times over the past four years, Ruddell said.

"Junior year, you get pretty burnt out, but you have a goal. So even though you're getting burnt out, you're working toward something so you look at it like that," he said. "Senior year, you've already gotten your branch, you're not being evaluated anymore, ... so it's difficult to maintain that motivation and that drive to give back to the cadet core."

Overall, Ruddell said he feels he had done a good job staying motivated. He hopes to better prepare himself for the Army by teaching younger military science students and staying in top physical condition. One of his major responsibilities is to help

plan and conduct military science lab sessions.

"All the leadership labs are designed to improve the cadets in one way or another," he said. "Whether it's getting them ready for future training, or getting them ready for camp or anything else."

Ruddell has drawn praise from instructors for his abilities as well.

"His interpersonal skills area really quite

extraordinary," said Capt. James Miller, a military science instructor.

"He has a very genuine, good sense of humor. Whenever someone expresses something to him, he always seems to have the right way to respond to it."

Cadets are required to wear uniforms around campus every Thursday, which causes ROTC students to stand out in classes. Ruddell said people don't always understand the uniforms.

"I think (people) just see the uniform as opposed to the person," Ruddell said. "When we're in uniform, granted we're required to act in certain ways, let's say, for politics. I can't talk about whether I like the president or whether I don't like the president. ... I can't speak for the military."

"It's just like a uniform for any other type of job. When I wear that, I represent (the Army)."

Ruddell said he and other ROTC cadets were marching to camp once and a passerby leaned out of her car and said "I hope you all die over there."

"I just kind of feel sorry for people that feel like that or act like that," Ruddell said. "As a soldier, you have

no control over policy ... We sign up to serve the people; we don't sign up to serve the president."

After graduation, cadets are required to spend at least four years in active duty and an additional four years in the Army Reserve. Ruddell will enter the Army on June 17 as a second lieutenant, then work as a recruiter over the summer.

In November, Ruddell will attend the Infantry Officer Basic Course at Fort Benning, Ga. After that, he expects to receive command of a group of enlisted soldiers, some of whom may have been in the Army for far longer than he has.

"It's going to be interesting, getting in there with everybody that's already had combat experience," he said. "And there's not really going to be an easy way of doing it."

Ruddell doesn't know where he'll be stationed yet, but he hopes to be in Hawaii, Alaska or Germany in a light or mechanized infantry or airborne division.

"One of our cadre members just came down from Alaska and had a lot of good stories," Ruddell said. "People jumping out of planes and getting neck-deep in snow when they hit the ground."

Ruddell said he isn't scared of the chance of being deployed.

"I see it as ... inevitable," he said. "It's what I signed up for. If I don't go, that would mean that someone else would have to go. ... I think it's selfish of me to say, 'No, I'm not going to go, I'm going to make someone else risk their life for me.'"

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