



Vanderbilt University Naval ROTC

Commodore Cable – Spring 2023



Commodores, as I reflect on the end of another academic year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the exceptional young men and women who make up our unit, and for the unwavering support of our alumni, parents, and military community supporters. As Commanding Officer, I have been honored to lead this outstanding group of midshipmen for the past three years. It has been a privilege to work with such talented and motivated individuals that have voluntarily chosen to pursue a path to server their country and to see them grow and develop into naval officers.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to our alumni, parents, and supporters. Your generosity and unwavering commitment to our unit have been instrumental in our success, and we could not have achieved what we have without your support. This year marked a return to business as usual and was highlighted by the National Security Symposium with former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John Richardson delivering the keynote address and Chancellor Daniel Diermeier offering remarks. The event was a huge success and will be a springboard to an even better event in 2023, where the former commander of US Special Operations Command (SOCOM), General Richard Clarke is on tap to deliver the keynote address on Friday, November 3rd.



As I step back and assess the Commodore Battalion, I firmly believe the “State of the Battalion” is strong. We ended the spring semester on a high note. After a narrow 3-0 loss in the Army vs Navy Football game in the fall, the midshipmen brought a renewed intensity to the spring Joint ROTC Olympics against the Army and Air Force ROTC units. With a hard-fought win in basketball, a closing minute go-ahead score in soccer, an impressive seven victories on the track, and a dominating cornhole win, the Commodore Battalion was crowned as Olympic Champions rightfully returning the “Olympic plate” hardware to the Naval ROTC end of the passageway. We closed the semester on a beautiful day in April, with alumni and university leadership in attendance, where the Commodore Battalion proudly displayed their drill precision and professionalism at the Spring Parade on Peabody Esplanade. The ceremony also marked the transition of midshipmen leadership from the Spring 2023 Battalion Commander, 1/c Hunter Johnson, to 2/c Makayla Couchenour who will lead the Battalion in fall semester.

This May we bid farewell to nine graduating seniors, who led with passion and perseverance. They are a notably smaller class, but an extremely talented and dedicated group that will proudly represent the Commodore Battalion in the Fleet. The group includes four ensigns that will join the nuclear navy (three as Submarine Warfare Officers and one Surface Warfare Officer-Nuclear Option),

three Surface Warfare Officers who will be homeported in Yokosuka, Japan, Mayport, FL, and San Diego, CA, one Naval Aviator headed to Flight School in Pensacola, FL and one Navy Nurse reporting to the hospital at Fort Belvoir, VA. The lone Marine Second Lieutenant will report in June to The Basic School (TBS) in Quantico, VA and receive his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) upon completion.

I also want to share a few updates on important projects. This year we have made concrete strides to address the housing challenges experienced by the Tennessee State University cross-town midshipmen. We are directly engaging with TSU leadership to provide priority access to on campus housing and working with the Vanderbilt NROTC Alumni Association to provide a housing scholarship to offset expenses not covered by the NROTC scholarship. Another exciting area of support from our alumni is the project to bring both anchors from the decommissioned USS NASHVILLE (LPD-13) back to her namesake city and the Vanderbilt campus. One anchor will be featured prominently in the VU athletic field renovation project and the second anchor will be placed outside the ROTC building. The anchor project is a great opportunity to amplify the presence of Naval ROTC on campus and deepen our naval heritage ties at Vanderbilt - truly an "Anchor Down" moment. Finally, on the recruiting front, we capped of another strong year, with 22 students committed to joining Vanderbilt Naval ROTC in the spring (18 VU students and 4 TSU students). The strength of battalion continues to grow with a projected battalion end strength topping 80 midshipmen for the fall semester!

As I bid farewell to Vanderbilt this summer and retire from the Navy, I leave with the knowledge that our unit is in good hands. I have the utmost confidence in our midshipmen, and in the leadership of Captain Aron Buckles, who arrives in Nashville with an impressive track record of operational experience as a Naval Flight Officer from the EA-6B "Prowler" community, where he commanded an Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ-134) and is fresh of a tour with the Pacific Fleet.

Thank you again for your support and commitment to the Vanderbilt Naval ROTC program. It has been an honor to serve as the Commanding Officer. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the VUNROTC Alumni Association. Your continued generosity enables an enriched NROTC experience for the midshipmen and contributes immeasurably to the development of our future Navy and Marine Corps officers. Unequivocally, your support sets the conditions for the Commodore Battalion's success and our commitment to *developing leaders for the Navy and the Nation* and to recruit, retain, and commission a diverse and talented officer corps that *reflects the Sailors and Marines we lead, and the Nation we serve*.

Very respectfully,



Brian "Rookie" Erickson
Captain, US Navy



Anchor Down and LEAD

