NEW ARMY OFFICER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Cadet to Commission through Command

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CADET TO COMMISSION THROUGH COMMAND

LEVI J. FLOETER

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For AJ, Andy, and Julianne Weiss.
Danny would understand.

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Foreword

THIS is a resource that is different from many you may have read about the military. I made a ton of mistakes on my journey, and most of the "don'ts" in here I learned the hard way. The beautiful thing I found out about this job is that it's fairly forgiving if you have a good work-ethic, cultivate a sense of humor, and you can take (and apply) corrective criticism.

Bear in mind that we are always personally responsible for growing ourselves. If you are satisfied with your measure of accomplishment, you have just lost the most important battle in the war for self-development. This is doubly important in leadership, and as an officer, you are expected to lead yourself as well as those who work for you in such a manner as to better the organization you serve.

The following is drawn from personal experience as well as the advice of dozens of leaders I have known and worked with. The intent of this book is simply to provide the best of that experience and advice to you as you work through one of the most challenging times in any career: the beginning. Good luck, and have fun!

Acknowledgments

SPECIAL thanks are due to the following for the grooming, professional advice, editing, and contributions to my experience of life. You all helped take this from a bunch of bullet comments in a green notepad into what it is today.

My Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, the Airborne Ranger in the Sky. Thank you for forgiving me.

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and sanded down some really rough edges. I am in your debt, thank you all.

Thanks to my Ranger Buddy, CSM Michael Barrera, and to CPTs Jake Jones and Jacob Piscal; you showed me what it means to live the standard.

To the men of A Co, 1-17th IN, 5/2 SBCT: thank you for keeping me in the bubble and teaching me what it means to lead in extreme conditions.

For the soldiers and officers of Apache Co, 1-501st IN (ABN): "Geronimo was an Apache!" Enough said; you were the best company a first-time CO could have ever asked for, and thanks again for the great times.

Finally, to Danny Weiss, Chris Bierer, Franky Kim, Jeff Lawrence, James "Doc" Kirker, Paolo Grassi, and Robert Giffen III. Follow the Black and Gold plan, boys, and we will meet again; the first round is on me. Rangers Lead the Way!

PART I

The Cadet

Chapter 1

Making an Officer

EVERYONE who pins on that gold bar had to do a few things to make it possible, and whether your commissioning source is college ROTC, a senior military academy like Virginia Military Institute or the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, or you made "the switch" from the enlisted ranks, it's all a fairly long process. There are a few reasons for this—maturity being one of them—but the program generally isn't hard, so don't be discouraged.

College Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTCs) account for the majority of the commissioned officers each year outside of West Point, and this is also how I received my commission, so we will start there. Typically, college ROTCs structure themselves in a four-year model; however, all you really need to commission through one of these programs is Accessions Camp, your basic military science credit hours (300- and 400-level classes), and a bachelor's degree. We will begin with the ROTC process and some easy ways to ensure you don't get caught at the bottom of the pile when it comes time to apply for your commission. Since MS-III year is the time that the hard stuff begins for ROTC cadets, we will only briefly

discuss MS-I and MS-II so we can dig in and really get to the important stuff there.

ROTC—A GENERAL OVERVIEW.

To start out with, ROTC is separated into two phases, the Basic Course and the Advanced Course. The Army ROTC webpage describes the Basic Course as:

ARMY ROTC BASIC COURSE

Two Years That Will Prepare You for Years to Come

The Basic Course takes place during your first two years in college as elective courses. It normally involves one elective class and lab each semester along with the requisite physical training and field training exercises. You will learn basic military skills, the fundamentals of leadership and start the groundwork toward becoming an Army leader. You can take Army ROTC Basic Courses without a military commitment.

Freshman Year:
Preparing For Success as an Army Officer

Topics covered include:

- Introduction to Army Leadership
- Army Customs and Traditions
- Military Operations and Tactics
- Goal Setting and Accomplishment
- Health and Physical Fitness

Sophomore Year:
The Role of an Officer
Topics covered include:

- Applied Leadership Theory
- Communications
- Principles of War
- Military Operations and Tactics ("Army ROTC Basic Course")

Just like at all military institutions, cadets are assigned rank so that the ROTC can keep order and discipline in its formation. In older times, cadets were even called on to train soldiers and units during full-scale mobilization of war, such as the American Civil War, and in rare cases, Cadet Battalions have actually fought in active combat as their own separate units, so the rank structure actually means something. Most Cadet Battalions are trained as infantry units, occasionally artillery or other combat arms. See Figure 1.1 for an image of what the rank structure of most ROTC units looks like.

From an experience standpoint, the Basic Course is arranged as follows:

MS-I YEAR. In most university ROTCs, time as an MS-I (usually during freshman year) is designed to expose new cadets to what ROTC is and the pathway toward commissioning without chasing them off. The best advice anybody can take for this year is very simple: get engaged and learn as much as you

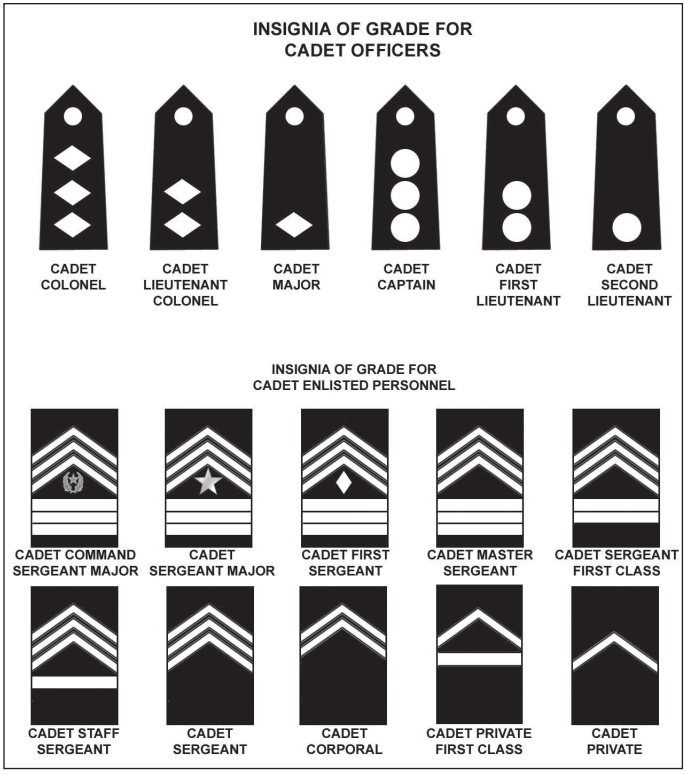

Figure 1.1

can, get fit or stay fit, and **get great grades in school**. If you can do those things and stay out of trouble, then your MS-I year will be a success. There will likely be a few learning experiences along the way, and a few PT tests and field problems to evaluate how you perform individually and as a part of a fire-team or squad element, but the MS-I year is usually pretty low stress in college ROTC.

MS-II YEAR. You came back for seconds, literally, which probably means you liked the stuff you got to see as an MS-I and might be ready to lead this year's batch of new cadets. MS-II's are typically the team and squad leader equivalents across the ROTC, meaning now you are going to get a taste of what it feels like to have some responsibility. Use this time to figure out some of your styles of leadership and don't be afraid—that's what this year is for.

On the flip-side of getting to lead as an MS-II, it exposes you to what it feels like to be responsible for the actions of a group and not just for yourself. Get used to that quickly! Own it when the group, or individuals in the group you lead, mess it up both on- and off-duty because that is a crucial element in being an Army leader at any level. You never put down the mantle of responsibility.

There are some key things to remember about this year in ROTC. First, **your GPA and PT scores are even more important** because they show a pattern to your ROTC military science instructors. If you haven't done a "Simultaneous Mission Program" contract and gone to Basic Training (which we will discuss later), you may need to go to the Leader's Training Course over the summer between your MS-II and MS-III year.

The Leader's Training Course is a four-week course at Fort Knox, Kentucky designed to teach MS-II cadets basic soldier skills such as Land Navigation, Drill and Ceremony, Map Reading, and Marksmanship. The course also exposes them to a longer field-problem than many ROTCs do and evaluate their leadership skills to prepare them for Accessions Camp the following year as an MS-III.

As you get ready to become an MS-III, it is time to start looking toward contracting. Early in the fall of that year, you should apply for acceptance to become an officer in the army, and if accepted, you will sign a contract and transition to the ROTC Advanced Course. It is here, facing your junior year of college, where you've made the decision to commission, and the following summer, you will go to Accessions Camp. This is the big year that will determine where you rank compared to the other graduating cadets in your senior year, and it has a lot of weight on what branch of the military you will be elected to serve in, whether by your own choice or by that of the army itself.

Here's what the army has to say about the Advanced Course:

ARMY ROTC ADVANCE COURSE

Graduate College with a Degree in Leadership

The Advanced Course takes place during your last two years in college as elective courses. It normally includes one elective class and lab each semester in addition to the requisite physical training and field training exercises, plus a summer leadership camp. You will learn advanced military tactics and gain experience in team organization, planning, and decision-making. To benefit from the leadership training in the Advanced Course, all Cadets must have completed either the Basic Course or have attended the Leader's Training Course. Entering the Advanced Course requires a commitment to serve as an Officer.

Commissioned Officers are the managers, problem solvers, key influencers and planners who lead Enlisted Soldiers in all situations in the U.S. Army after you graduate. Since every school's Army ROTC curriculum varies, some of these course topics may not be offered at all campuses.

Junior Year:
Leading Small Tactical Units

Topics covered include:

- Command and Staff Functions
- Law of War
- Weapons
- Team Dynamics and Peer Leadership
- Military Operations and Tactics" ("Army ROTC Basic Course")

MS-III YEAR. Here we go. Junior year of college and it's definitely crunch-time in more ways than one. Your curriculum has gotten more in depth with 300- and some 400-level classes now demanding a higher degree of research and thought, and your ROTC program likely has you in a larger leadership role than last year because you are preparing to go through Camp in nine short months. If you are also working outside of school to help put yourself through college, then the squeeze is going to feel pretty real. Typically, this year will be your first taste of managing multiple echelons of leadership in different roles while still moving yourself toward a goal, and it is going to be a

challenge if you've never been under that kind of pressure. I can recall junior and senior year at college as a time when I was taking twenty to twenty-four credit hours per quarter, including ROTC, while holding down a full-time night shift working security at a steel foundry and serving in the U.S. army reserves. Initially, I had never been so stressed out, but as time wore on, something magical happened: I learned to prioritize my whole life to get me to basic mission accomplishment. While doing this, I also learned to positively manage my time, my rest, my relationships, and to think critically despite fatigue. *Welcome to what it means to be an army officer.*

MS-III year just might be the most demanding year along the road to becoming an officer because of the complexity and the uncertainty. Nagging questions and not knowing how you may do at Camp, as well as the ever-present worry of the "Big Green Machine" simply giving you a branch you don't want, can add levels of stress that you previously may not have experienced in ROTC. For those about to go through this period of time, here's the best advice I've got.

Don't Overload. As you can probably deduce from my own story about being completely swamped the last half of my undergrad, I made some pretty dumb mistakes in my early college years, and I needed to catch up on courses in order to commission on time. So, if you were like me and initially came to school with absolutely no idea what you wanted to study—falling into the ROTC program a year or two later than those who decided to do it in high school—you may not have this luxury. However, if at all possible in your junior year, it is absolutely critical to manage

your college course load so that you can focus on getting great grades, doing your very best at ROTC, and staying physically fit so you can crush Summer Camp.

Remember that you have counselors and academic advisors for a reason, and that your professors are human beings just like you. Typically, if you sit down with your Educational Advisor, you can work out a plausible course schedule that helps your ultimate goal of graduating on time. You can work around small timing issues like having once a week Lab at ROTC get in the way of another course like Math 301: *Intro to Calculus*.

A good way to work around minor scheduling conflicts is to bring your issues privately to your assistant professor of military science (APMS, usually a senior captain) and have them help you get some time with the PMS, your ROTC battalion commander. Remember the LTC in charge of the ROTC battalion is a temporarily-hired professor for the college, and commissioning officers is the entire aim of his program. If you can get a memo, phone call, or note explaining the situation to the math professor, it may work out in your favor, especially if you come up on the net with that teacher before you are already enrolled in the class. Missing one pre-scheduled day a week isn't like you are skipping class to go joyriding on your motorcycle, and many college professors understand that.

Use Your Online Resources. No, I am not talking about Google. It's a digital age, and almost every college campus now offers many of their classes online. This is a perfect resource to tap into when you have multiple timing conflicts in your schedule and need to be in two places at once. Since you can't physically do

that, if you can get one of the two conflicting courses offered online, you can "get it in where you fit it in" and work around the conflict that way.

The online schooling world is a really great tool when it comes to needing to work a job that has some seriously demanding hours. I have seen some folks who decided to do ROTC in their mid-to-late 20's make it happen despite their crazy schedules. They were able to be successful simply by taking most of their courses online and only coming to the actual campus for the ROTC classes they needed.

Study Leadership. Going to Accessions Camp is probably the biggest thing you will do in support of commissioning, period. You need to be ready mentally for the challenge of leading your peers in a setting where literally ninety percent of them are trying to outdo you. There's a saying in the army that leadership is hard, and leading your peers is even harder. I have found this to be accurate. I have also found that there is a definite art to leading that must be deliberately cultivated if you are not one of the few people blessed with the certain special charisma where everybody just wants to follow you.

Reading is a great way to develop a larger understanding of techniques that can be applied to leadership. Also, your university may offer a course in the study of leadership, and if you have the time in your MS-III year to take an extra class or two focused solely on the study of leadership outside of ROTC, I highly encourage you to do so. Be careful not to overload, but doing some additional coursework on this critical skill can really help you apply the right form to the right group or

individual. You may get a platoon at Camp where everybody gets along, but the truth is, this is pretty unlikely. You are more apt to break down into subgroups within the platoon that mutually support one another when they have to but probably never want to see each other again when it's over. Finding the intangible keys to motivating a squad or a platoon when you are out there on the FTX getting your grades can be the difference between everybody having a great patrol and everybody not. This also applies everywhere you will go in the army after you commission, whether at your unit, downrange, or in schools like Ranger or Sapper where the FTX portion and your peer evaluations make or break your grades.

Do Not Be a Spotlight Ranger. Somebody once told me that "if you find yourself the smartest and fittest guy in the room, you are probably in the wrong room," and I have not found them to be wrong. If that describes your situation, now or in the future, you need to be very careful of how much of your skill set you let show before people, who find themselves not as bright or as fit, decide to start turning up the hate. Remember, your MS-III year is all about shining when it's time to shine and doing your very best when you get put to the test, but always ensure you temper this with humility and a deep respect for everybody else. It's best to learn this now rather than later on down the road, so practice it heavily in everything you do this year. *Never, ever* beat your own chest about doing well, either in your ROTC, at Camp, or while you are an officer. You will quickly find yourself friendless and alone, and worse, you will be labeled as somebody not to trust because nobody puts faith in a spotlight ranger.

To tie this crucial skill of being a high performer who can manage to not engender the dislike of others into your MS-III experience, consider the benefits of developing a mutually respecting culture through supporting your formation no matter your role. "Servant-Leadership" is not a new concept; it may be a new way of saying something, but the traits it describes have never changed. The best leaders I have ever known are all great followers with positive attitudes, who choose their actions and words carefully, and who also know when it is time to dig in their heels to stand up for what is right despite the popular vote to the contrary.

The Cadet Leader's Course (CLC). By now you will have heard about CLC—otherwise known as "Camp"—more than a few times, but the truth is you really can't hear it enough. Put your personal feelings aside no matter how you may end up feeling about going to Camp, especially once you get there. It's only twenty-nine days of your life, but it determines a great deal of the next several years in the army, and *camp is not the army*. Remember, the design of Accessions Camp is to be something that screens for leadership potential, fitness, and the ability to work with others. It is not designed to weed out every person who struggles in one or more of these areas.

The mission of U.S. Army Cadet Command, as stated on their webpage, is to partner "with universities to recruit, educate, develop, and inspire Senior ROTC Cadets in order to commission officers of character for the Total Army."

Nowhere in this mission statement does it say anything about "selecting" anybody. Don't expect Camp to be a grueling

selection process during which only a few remain at the end. Accept it for what it is, and do your very best.

In order to receive your branch, the army is going to evaluate you on two to three major areas during your junior year: your APFT average, your GPA up to that point, and—unless this changes, which sometimes it does—how you do at CLC. You've likely already worked your butt off for the last three years, and your GPA and APFT are already locked in before you go to camp (minus that APFT you will take there, to seal your average), so it is imperative that you clear this last hurdle.

To that end, knowledge is power, so we will go into some details about CLC. The breakdown of the major events at Camp can be found online at:

http://www.cadetcommand.army.mil/training/op-clc.aspx

Directly from the above website, CLC is described as the following:

> The Cadet Leader Course (CLC) is now held annually at Fort Knox, Kentucky. The U.S. Army's largest training exercise, CLC is the U.S. Army Cadet Command's capstone training event.

The purpose of the course is to train U.S. Army ROTC Cadets to be familiar with army standards, to develop their leadership skills, and to evaluate their officer potential. Most army cadets attend CLC between their junior and senior undergraduate years. Successful completion of CLC is a prerequisite to becoming an army officer through ROTC.

The twenty-nine-day course starts with individual training and leads to collective training, building from simple to complex tasks. This building-block approach permits integration of previously-learned skills into follow-on training. This logical, common-sense training sequence is maintained for each training cycle. Every day at CLC is a day of training.

Below are some highlights:

Land Navigation: Land Navigation training must be mastered early in the training cycle for the Cadets to be fully successful in the tactical training which follows. The Land Navigation evaluation consists of three events totaling one hundred points. The written examination is worth 20%. The day Land Navigation test is worth 50%. The night Land Navigation test is worth 30%. Each cadet must earn 70% on each test to pass this event. A passing score in Land Navigation is a criterion for success. Prior to Land Navigation, cadets will learn field craft while living and sleeping in the woods. They will set up field-expedient shelters using ponchos and whatever else is available. They'll learn how to maintain noise, light, and litter discipline.

Confidence Training: This includes rappel training, the Slide For Life, Log Walk/Rope Drop, and confidence and obstacle courses. Confidence Training is designed to challenge the cadets' physical courage, build confidence in personal abilities, and help them overcome fear. At the rappelling site, each cadet executes one seventeen-foot rappel and several thirty-seven-foot rappels. Cadets demonstrate confidence in their ability to overcome fear of heights by executing the Confidence/Obstacle Course, Log Walk/Rope Drop, and Slide For Life.

Field Leader's Reaction Course: FLRC is designed to develop and evaluate leadership and to build teamwork early in the training cycle. Course administration is accomplished using the established cadet organization and chain of command. Cadet leadership potential is assessed by committee evaluators. Cadets are provided the opportunity to get early feedback on their leadership strengths, weaknesses, styles, and techniques.

CBRNE: Chemical, Biological Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive Training teaches Cadets how to administer a nerve agent antidote, how to protect themselves from chemical and biological contamination using their assigned protective mask, decontaminate themselves and individual equipment using chemical decontaminating kits, and how to react to chemical or biological hazard/attack. In addition, Cadets must go through the CS gas chamber and the COBALT Challenge Lane.

U.S. Weapons Familiarization: Familiarizes cadets with the operation and employment of infantry squad weapons and call for fire grid missions. The Cadets train in the fundamentals of operation and engaging of targets and emplacement of crew-served weapons such as the M-249, M203, and M136.

Cultural Awareness: Teaches cadets a basic understanding of cultural matters and how cultural awareness will facilitate mission success. Cadets learn how to conduct bi-lateral discussions with local officials, how to conduct a knock and search mission, and how to defuse volatile situations using an interpreter.

First Aid: Cadets develop confidence in their ability to react properly to battlefield wounds. Through hands-on training and evaluation, cadets learn critical first aid skills.

Maneuver Training: In the first block of instruction in maneuver at CLC, cadets learn individual battlefield skills, combat movement techniques, and procedures necessary for subsequent tactical training at the squad level. Maneuver training is a vehicle to teach and evaluate leadership. It introduces conditions of stress that parallel those found in combat. Tactical training introduces new skills, provides performance-oriented reinforcement opportunities, and increases the degree of difficulty and sophistication of training events. Cadets learn the skills necessary to function in a Tactical Training Area. This building-block approach provides the best opportunity for cadets to learn and for cadre to assess leadership potential.

Tactics: Squad Situational Training and Patrolling Situational Training Exercises (currently) have been combined under the tactics committee. They take place back-to-back while cadets are at the Tactical Training Base.

Tactical Training Base: Cadets operate for five days out of a hard site facility between Maneuver Training and Patrolling. They learn how to provide security by guarding gates and doing squad-level reconnaissance around the TTB, how to conduct TTB operations, and how they have to prepare for Patrolling.

Squad Situational Training Exercise: Squad STX is a four-day, two-phase event. The first day, the squad training phase, is designed to train squad battle drills and collective tasks. The last three days, the Squad STX lane phase, are designed to evaluate leadership using tactical scenarios. Each cadet receives two

formal evaluations of his/her performance as a squad leader during this phase. Squad operations build on and reinforce all previous instruction. Cadets use knowledge of land navigation, terrain analysis, weapons systems, and all individual training previously presented.

Patrolling Situational Training Exercise: Patrolling STX is a two-day event that provides cadets practical experience in leading Soldiers at the section level in a challenging, realistic, and fluid environment. On the first day, cadets undergo training; then, during the last three days, they participate in an exercise where they are formally evaluated. Developmental feedback is provided to all levels of leadership. Patrolling STX builds on and reinforces all previous instruction received during the course. The event ends with a 10K foot march. ("Cadet Leaders Course (CLC)")

As you can see, the course isn't terribly complex, but it will be a busy time during which everything you do can potentially have an effect on your future officer job. Don't panic. It's not like anybody has the "secret key" to ensuring they get rated in the top one percent of their year-group. I can tell you from personal experience that working hard, educating yourself, and staying in shape never hurt anybody's chances of securing a good ranking when it's time to get evaluated. Just remember the section on not being a spotlight ranger, stay humble, and everything will work out.

MS-IV YEAR. The finish-line is in sight! Nine months or so, and you'll be pinning on that gold bar and starting a new chapter in your life, and it certainly feels pretty cool. By now, your ROTC likely has you holding a key staff position, holding a commander/

field grade officer equivalent leadership position to finish out your learning curve, or mentoring junior cadets. Here's what the army has to say about MS-IV time:

Senior Year:
Transition to Becoming an Officer

Topics covered include:

- Training the Force
- Military Justice
- Ethical Decision Making
- Personnel Management
- Cultural Awareness
- Post and Installation Support
- Military Operations and Tactics. ("Army ROTC Advanced Course")

From personal experience, I can tell you that it may sort of feel like the heat turned up all the way now, what with all of your senior requirements, yet the big pressure is also kind of turned off because you've already survived evaluation and are about to receive your branch. Be careful not to get "Senior-itis" as you near the completion of your program. This is the time when you should be setting the right example for all those guys and gals coming up under you and really focusing on your next step: becoming a commissioned officer in the United States military.

Branching. Sometime in the fall, your branch orders will come out. It is usually around a November time frame for most ROTCS, as it takes a while for the boards to assess all the MS-III's who just went to camp last summer. Again, DON'T PANIC! It is a little bit of a worrisome time, but no matter if you get your number-one pick or are selected to serve somewhere you listed at the bottom of your preference sheet, being an army officer is still a great time. There's really nothing like it. I can tell you that every single branch in the army has great things for you to do, and no matter what branch you get, your experience will be what YOU make of it.

Practice Leadership. MS-IV year in ROTC is the time you get to polish yourself into the best possible candidate for success in the army, so use your time wisely during this last, crucial period of your commissioning process. This is where you study the bread and butter of being an officer. There are entire shelves of books on leading, and this handbook is no exception. The sole purpose of this guide is to provide some first-hand insight into being a new company-grade officer in the army, but it is by far not the only resource you can read to help you out along the way (see the "Further Reading" section in Chapter Nine). Do your homework, both in terms of being a college senior, and in the sense that you are transitioning into your time as a lieutenant so you need to know what is coming your way. Schedule time to sit with your APMS and your battalion commander, make a list of questions you want them to answer about being in the army, and then research the answers before you sit down with them so you have at least some understanding of what you are asking for.

It is necessary that we close this piece with a note of caution. I had a good friend in my ROTC program who would have been a fine officer, except he got into some trouble his senior year and was not only declined a commission, but also was forced to pay back his scholarship because he was unable to fulfill his service in the military to pay the government back for his four years of schooling. Remember, it's not over; it's only just beginning. Be extra careful with your off-duty behaviors outside of ROTC, and ensure that you keep your nose clean this year. The best advice I can give any MS-IV student is this: stay on top of your grades, keep away from situations where you could get into legal trouble, prepare to commission, and lastly—stay fit.

[End of Sample Material]