

# Fit for life **Cadet program teaches healthy lifestyle**

*By Mitzi Palmer*



Cadet Capt. William McLaughlin, fifth from far end, and other CAP cadets train at the Air Force Pararescue Orientation Course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz.

**F** For the South Carolina Wing's 2010 Cadet of the Year, Cadet Capt. Sarah Sill, staying physically fit is no option. Not only is it a passion, it's also a requirement embedded deeply in the Civil Air Patrol cadet program.

Sill, a 17-year-old avid runner, is a member of Spartanburg Composite Squadron. She joined CAP five years ago because of her interest in attending the U.S. Air Force Academy and her dream of becoming a fighter pilot and a career Air Force officer. Sill soloed in a CAP glider at age 14,

and at 16 she earned her private pilot's license.

During cross country season at her local high school, she runs a minimum of five miles a day, with the exception of the day before a race. In the offseason, she trains on her own schedule and encourages fellow cadets to do the same.

"I run every other day about three miles," Sill said, "and days in between, I alternate weightlifting upper body and lower body."

She also maintains a six-meal-a-day eating program enriched with low-fat, high-quality proteins and carbohydrates.

## Fitness in cadet life

Physical fitness is one of the four pillars in cadet life, along with leadership, aerospace education and character development. In fact, all squadrons must make fitness training, sports, calisthenics and fitness drills part of their program.

"The overall goal of the fitness element in the cadet program is to develop in cadets a lifelong habit of regular exercise," said Curt LaFond, CAP's deputy director for cadet programs.

LaFond and CAP's handbook on physical fitness identify two facets to the program: training and testing.

Fitness training includes stretching, calisthenics, fitness drills, circuits, team sports and any activities that are fun but still physically challenging. In addition, cadets are briefed on the basic principles of exercise, why fitness is important and how to exercise safely.

As cadets advance in their squadron fitness program, they are required to pass a cadet physical fitness test, known within CAP as the CPFT. It is based on the President's Challenge — the premier program of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition.

Administered through a co-sponsorship agreement with the Amateur Athletic Union, the President's



New Jersey Wing Capt. David Maver, CAP's 2006 National Cadet of the Year, is a distance runner. The sport helps him ward off the effects of diabetes.

Challenge gives people of all ages and abilities the proper tools needed to increase physical activity and improve fitness.

CAP's CPFT consists of curl-ups, push-ups, sit-and-reach and either a one-mile run or a shuttle run. It also considers gender, age and cadet rank.

"The fitness test standards for cadet officers often exceed the entry requirements for the Air Force Academy," LaFond noted. "If kids have physical disabilities, they still participate in the cadet fitness program to the extent of their abilities, and the CPFT is

slightly modified to accommodate their special needs."

The National Cadet Advisory Council is currently debating the fitness test standards. "I take that as an encouraging sign of the cadets' seriousness about the program," LaFond said.

"CAP cadets have told us they want to keep their fitness standards high," he said. "They want a fitness test with standards that grow more challenging as the cadets grow older, stronger and earn promotions in rank."

## Encouragement from within

As with any activity in CAP, encouragement from fellow cadets and members is indispensable.

"Motivation is extremely important, especially for new cadets (who are sometimes as young as 12 years old) just entering the program," said Cadet Capt. William McLaughlin of the Nebraska Wing's Gen. Curtis E. LeMay Offutt Composite Squadron.

Part of a military family that moves around a lot, McLaughlin, along with his older brother and fellow

cadet, James, started their own “Physical Fitness Hall of Fame” when they were members of the Air Academy Cadet Squadron in Colorado.

“The goals are to give recognition to cadets who do well at their individual events, to spark friendly competition and to improve test scores,” said the 16-year-old cadet.

The concept of the hall of fame is to see who can achieve the fastest run, the most curl-ups and sit-ups and the longest sit-and-reach. Each night of a physical test, the board is updated to reflect who “won” in each category.

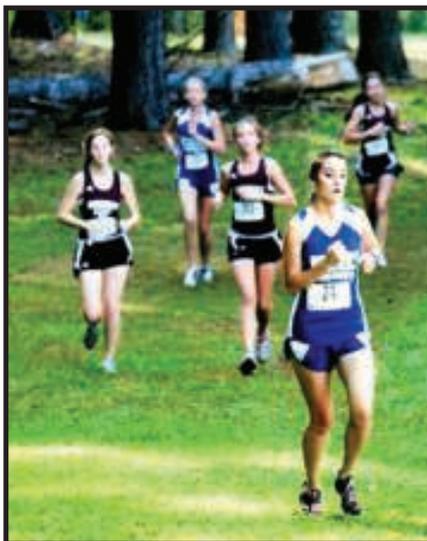
Apparently, the challenge has worked. The hall of fame increased its squadron’s 50 percent CPFT pass-percentage to 75 percent, McLaughlin said.

“The cadets were always so proud of themselves when the names would change on the board to reflect another top score,” he said.

The hall of fame idea has traveled with the McLaughlin brothers from the Air Academy squadron to Albuquerque Composite Squadron in New Mexico and then Nellis Composite Squadron in Nevada, and it’s now in the process of being implemented at their new squadron in Nebraska.

## Pushing through

Capt. David Maver, commander for the 2011 New Jersey Wing Basic Encampment and Region Cadet Leadership School, was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes mellitus at age 14. Instead of letting that handicap him, Maver joined



Cadet Capt. Sarah Sill leads the pack in the first race of the season, the Eye Opener at Milliken Research Center in Spartanburg, S.C.

the New Jersey Wing’s Jack Schweiker Composite Squadron in 2000, immersed himself in the cadet program and received CAP’s Gen. Carl A. Spaatz Award — the highest achievement a cadet can earn — and the National Cadet of the Year Award in 2006.

“I joined with a good friend of mine, since we shared a common interest in aerospace and becoming pilots,” Maver said. “The leadership opportunities within the program have shaped my life into what it is today.”

He was also the first cadet with diabetes to attend both

Hawk Mountain Ranger Training School and the Pararescue Orientation Course — two extremely physically demanding activities for search and rescue training.

Unfortunately for Maver, diabetes is a disqualification from future military involvement. But that doesn’t



Cadet Capt. William McLaughlin, front left in black shirt and shorts, does push-ups as part of the pararescue orientation course at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.

discourage him.

“I try to be an example for other cadets who have diabetes,” he said.

Maver is an avid runner, pursuing ultrarunning — a sport that focuses on conquering distances greater than the marathon’s 26.2 miles. In addition to having five marathons under his belt, he recently set a goal to run a 100-mile race this summer.

Maver’s other passion is ice and alpine climbing. He has climbed both Mount Rainier (14,412 feet) and Mount Baker (10,537 feet) in Washington.

Today, Maver is a registered nurse in the intensive care unit at Pennsylvania’s Hahnemann University Hospital. He continues to encourage young cadets to push their fitness levels in his position as encampment commander.

“In the U.S., we face grave public health concerns because of preventable disease, and most of these diseases are not found in populations of people who exercise and eat well,” Maver said. “CAP is a great platform to promote physical fitness.” ▲



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