

MENTORING

by C/LtCol Andrew J. Welsh, CAP

The mentoring program created by Maj. Barbara Cardell is one of the most outstanding training programs I have had the opportunity to experience. If performed correctly, and both parties are willing to do their best in the mentor/mentee roles, then it will lead to more outstanding cadets, and better future senior members. As I will turn senior soon, I can say that being a mentee has provided me with the senior transition training that CAP does not provide as of yet (at the time of this article being written, there were plans at National HQ to implement a Senior Transition Program).

I've seen mentoring at three encampments, and I can say that the cadets come out of the encampment with a better understanding of how an encampment works, that seniors are actually good for something, and a newfound respect for the amount of work that entails an encampment.

Having spoken to some cadets in other wings, they have the general attitude that encampments don't require much preparation work, that senior members are impossible to work with, and executive staff jobs are worth nothing. By far, mentoring at an encampment counters all of these points to the cadets on the executive staff. The general consensus of those who have served on staff at encampments is positive towards most seniors.

So far, I have only referred to mentoring on an executive staff level. It is extremely helpful to them. However, I think it is CRUCIAL for those on command staff. When you are on cadet command staff, there will be three or four times that you will be completely stumped on a problem that you should handle on your level. The mentor provides the advice, or the different way of seeing a problem that is extremely helpful. Since it gets lonely on the top, the mentor becomes that much more important.

When it comes to flight staff, and the TAC's, mentoring is intertwined in with the TAC's job. My first encampment on staff was as flight sergeant at Plattsburgh. At the time, I did not know of mentoring, but as far as my relationship with the TAC and I, it was a mentoring role even though mentoring was not formally practiced at the encampment.

My personal experiences with mentoring at Camp Smith were very positive. The mentors gave me the person to vent with, to discuss problem solving, and to get job advice. I can safely say that some of the cadet staff were not as fortunate as I to have assigned to them two outstanding and dedicated seniors. Not everyone is Mr. or Mrs. Wonderful, and that can cause problems. At Plattsburgh, in the first year of mentoring, some seniors thought it was a joke, and it was disturbing to see that- it undermined the effectiveness of the program.

Overall, mentoring is the best senior training for cadets, since it can prepare the cadet to operate in cadet programs. It also helps with preparing to do senior programs, since it forces the cadet to see how things run at encampment for seniors. Mentoring should be implemented across the country at encampment and squadron to help end cadet woes towards seniors.