On September 9, the WGNB took part in the third annual 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb. The event was organized by MIDN 1/C Minetti with help from the WGNB operations staff. We were joined by the Air Force and Army ROTC cadets and first responders from the local area. For the first time, the event was also open to campus students and staff.

This event was held to honor the first responders who gave the ultimate sacrifice during the September 11 attacks. Each participant was tasked with climbing 1,980 steps in Memorial Stadium, the same number of steps taken by first responders attempting to rescue those trapped in the Twin Towers.

The event began and ended with remarks from our Commanding Officer, CAPT Casteel. He gave the midshipmen and cadets, many of whom were not even born in 2001, a glimpse into what that fateful day was like as a military officer and as an American citizen. The climb provided a time for solemn reflection and introspection. Most attendees could not imagine climbing 110 stories of a burning tower in full firefighting gear.

In conjunction with the event, there was a fundraiser for the Travis Manion Foundation. The Travis Manion Foundation uses donated funds to empower veterans and support the families of those affected by the 9/11 attacks. MIDN 1/C Minetti did an excellent job pulling off such a complex event and was later awarded the Legion of Valor Bronze Cross for his achievement.

Wednesday, September 29th, marked the first battalion-wide hike in over two and a half years. The event was led by Charlie company and planned by the company’s XO, MIDN 2/C Spitzner, and PltSgt, MIDN 2/C Lee. Hikes such as these are common training exercises for Marine option MIDN, but the addition of Navy options made it unique. Navy MIDN were expected to carry assault packs ranging from 35 lbs to 45 lbs and up. Marine options had the same weight requirements for their packs, in addition to flak vests and kevlar.

When asked about the planning that went into this battalion event, MIDN Spitzner said that Charlie Co. focused on efficiently distributing gear to navy options, finding a perfect route, and making sure the proper safety measures were put in place. With CAPT Casteel leading the column, the battalion moved at a fast pace, giving everyone enough time to climb the parking garage and do an extra lap around the main quad. Spitzner’s overall take? “In the end, the hike went well, but with some minor adjustments, it could be even better in the future.”

Job well done to Charlie Co. for successfully planning and executing this event! We look forward to future joint Navy and Marine option trainings such as this. Perhaps a longer hike is in store for the future?

LT Andrew Frey served the WGNB for over three years as our Naval Aviation advisor and freshman class advisor. As much as our midshipmen wanted him to stay at the unit another year, the Navy had other plans in mind. LT Frey is heading to his next duty station aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln in San Diego.

Before he departed, the battalion hosted a farewell celebration for him at Legends here in Champaign. At his send-off party, LT Frey was awarded with the Meritorious Service Medal by CAPT Casteel along with other gifts from staff and midshipmen, including a picture that was signed by the entire battalion. Everyone wrote a brief message wishing him luck in his new endeavors and telling him how much he meant to them. MIDN 4/C Baser wrote: “Thank you for everything. Your friendliness and welcoming manner on my visit are one of the reasons I joined this unit.”

Despite only having advised the 4/C for about a month, LT Frey had an incredible impact on their lives which demonstrates how valuable he was to this unit. The WGNB wishes him the best of luck in California!
Congratulations to MIDN 2/C Jisu Kim for being selected as September’s Battalion Member of the Month! MIDN Kim is studying Mechanical Engineering and currently serves as Delta Company Executive Officer, where he plays a vital role in the training of our freshman class. His award citation is as follows:

“MIDN Kim demonstrated exceptional leadership and initiative in his role on NSO Company Staff and continuously serves as a role model for his fellow midshipmen in Bravo Company. His dedication to the development of the 4/C as Delta Company XO has been a key factor in the program’s success, and he has served as an excellent example of the kind of midshipman the 4/C should strive to become.”

“MIDN Kim never fails to exceed the standard physically and academically, and he does so with a positive attitude that motivates others to perform at his level. He goes above and beyond to help his fellow classmates, and he can always be counted on to perform with incredible attention to detail. There is no doubt MIDN Kim will continue to exceed the standard in his future billets and in his naval career.”

STA-21 Officer Candidates here at the WGNB have the opportunity to take advancement exams for their rate and compete for promotion, just like their counterparts in the fleet. OC Adam Kantner did just that, blowing his exam out of the water and securing a promotion to Petty Officer 1st Class! Although we have not yet reached his official promotion date, CAPT Casteel had the distinct privilege of frocking OC Kantner to 1st Class. OC Kantner studies Mechanical Engineering and has provided tons of valuable and mentorship insight as one of the only enlisted Sailors in the battalion.

Do YOU want to be part of the WGNB?
You can apply for the 4-year national scholarship online and list your top school as UIUC. If you are accepted, you will get your tuition paid for, a stipend during the year, and you will begin training over summer to become a future naval officer. Even if you don’t get accepted, don’t worry! You can still pick up scholarship during the year. Also, if you are a resident of Illinois and not on scholarship, the University of Illinois offers in-state tuition waivers for ROTC students! We look forward to seeing you at the World’s Greatest Naval ROTC Battalion!