

Freshman Cadet Joe Stacey stands straight and tall, dressed head to toe in a green camouflage Army ROTC uniform and tan boots. With his last name stitched in black thread on the right side of his chest, he has known from a young age that he would be part of the armed services.

“Since I was born, my dad has been grooming me to be in the military,” Stacey said. “When I was growing up, instead of playing catch with my dad, he’d teach me military skills.”

Stacey is part of the largest incoming freshmen cadet class in Radford University’s history. The university enrolled 56 freshmen for the 2012-2013 academic school year. Since Sept. 11, 2001, enrollment in ROTC programs across the country has increased.

“Part of that stems from the fact that people want to serve their country and part of it also stems from the correlation between the economy and wanting job security,” said Capt. Chris Blanc who is in charge of ROTC recruitment at Radford.

For the past 34 years, Radford University’s Army Reserves Officers’ Training Corps program has been teaching and preparing young men and women for their futures. According to Radford’s Army ROTC website, the program, which was established between the presidents of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Radford University, is designed around the seven core values of an Army soldier, loyalty, duty, respect, personal courage, honor, integrity and selfless service.

For the first two years, cadets are taught basic skills and learn what it means to be in the Army. During their junior and senior year, cadets apply those basic skills and learn what it means to be an Army officer.

According to the U.S. Army's website, after graduation, ROTC students are commissioned as U.S. Army Second Lieutenants and receive specialized training in one of the 17 different Army branches.

Since the Revolutionary War, every Stacey male has served his country and now it is Stacey's turn to do the same. "Serving your country is something that every citizen does, whether they know it or not, by filling their niche in society," he said. "My service to my country is the willingness to put my life on the line in order to defend our freedom." Stacey said he knows that as a freshman, he still has a lot to learn, "right now I'm learning how to follow, which is good to know because when I am in a position of leadership in a few years, I will be able to appreciate what it means to be a subordinate." Stacey also said that the program will teach him to be a responsible officer who knows how to properly lead his troops.

Three days a week, Stacey wakes up first thing in the morning and attends PT (physical training) from 5:30 a.m. to 7 a.m.

"We'll run and do calisthenics, like push ups and sit-ups." Stacey must also take four military science courses during his time at Radford that will teach him management, national defense, military history, leadership, discipline, customs and military courtesy. Although Stacey is a member of the Army ROTC program, he insists that he is just like every other student. "Once training is over, I go about my day and go to class just like everyone else."

Stacey said he hopes that by participating in the Army ROTC program he can one day become a captain. According to the U.S. Army's website, an Army captain commands units of 62 to 190 soldiers and instructs skills at service schools and combat training centers. The skills Stacey learns through the Army ROTC program will help him obtain his future goals.

"I plan on making a career out of the Army," he said.