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## Naval Sea Cadets dock at post

By Amanda Kim Stairrett  
Fort Hood Herald

It's easy to see why they call J'Metri Burk "Smurf," but don't let the small-framed 11-year-old in Navy working blues fool you.

Burk can pass a physical training test, rig a floatation device from a pair of dungarees and a white "Dixie Cup" hat, pump out push-ups and march with the big boys. He's even cleaned barracks and said he had fun doing it.

Burk is a member of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadets, a youth organization developed by the Navy that is like "JROTC on steroids," said Navy Chief Warrant Officer-2 Thomas Howes.

Howes commands the local division's League Cadets, ages 10 to 13, and serves as supply and training officer. A former Army paratrooper who retired as a sergeant 1st class, Howes recently relocated from Austin to lead the local division at the invitation of III Corps.

The cadets have been allowed to operate in the former Longhorn Saloon building on West Fort Hood. The cadets, their volunteer leaders and parents spent last weekend working to turn the building into their headquarters, complete with a classroom, kitchen and drill area. The cadets also attended a leadership course at Fort Hood where they learned about working as a team to pass through obstacles.

The U.S. Naval Sea Cadets is a program designed to build good citizens, said Lt. Cmdr. Cynthia Banks, and is a way for kids 10 to 17 years old to get leadership skills. Banks is the commander of the local division. Cadets in chapters across the United States spend one weekend a month together as a unit.

Although the organization is modeled after the military, its goal isn't to recruit kids, Howes said. Many who sign up for the cadets have military ambitions and this experience can help them decide whether that is the life for them, Banks said.

Burk's dad is in the Army and stationed at Fort Hood. The cadet said he wants to enlist as a Marine and become a chief warrant officer.

Five of the chapter's 20 cadets have parents stationed at Fort Hood, Banks said. But, potential cadets don't have to be military dependents, Howes said.

Eric Meiner is a 17-year-old from the Austin area who spent several days in June learning amphibious operations in Virginia. His parents aren't in the military, but his mother found out about the program from a Web site.

Meiner and other cadets from across the United States had to survive on a beach, set up camp in the woods and practice unit movements and strategies. Meiner said the training taught him he had limits that he could push past.

Alex Boucher is a 14-year-old cadet from Austin with aspirations of joining the Navy once she graduates high school, and wants to be in the intelligence field. Her dad was in the Navy and talked about it a lot, she said, and that sparked her interest.

She and Eddie Hall, a 17-year-old petty officer who is the chapter's highest-ranking member, spent Saturday teaching the younger cadets and several potential

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members how to march and turn properly.

Hall joined the cadets at age 11 and has since become qualified as a first responder. He wants to become a Navy Corpsman and work with Marines.

Pfc. Justin Brown volunteers with the cadets and his stepson is a member. Joining the Army was the best thing that ever happened in his life, Brown said, but he doesn't push his stepson 11-year-old Decoda Grant, who already wants to go into the military.

Brown said the organization's influence is long lasting because the skills the cadets pick up on the weekends stick with them.

To find out more about the U.S. Naval Sea Cadets, visit [www.seacadets.org](http://www.seacadets.org) or contact Howes at (254) 793-3401.

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