

ROTC heroes in our shadows

Courtney Campbell
Senior Reporter

It's 4:50 a.m. The sun isn't even up yet, the birds aren't chirping and Elon University sophomore Austin Hughes' alarm begins to buzz. Rolling out of bed, he puts on his camouflage uniform and heads to North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro for physical training at 5:50 a.m.

Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday he participates in a variety of physical activities, from running four miles to pushups and burpees, switching up exercises to keep all parts of his body trained. Training ends at 7 a.m., and he returns to Elon's campus, avoiding traffic if he's lucky.

Hughes is part of Elon's Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) program, which trains future commissioned officers of the United States Armed Forces. After Elon, he will serve eight years as an officer in the U.S. Army.

"Both my parents served [in the US Army], and both had great careers, so they encouraged it," Hughes said. "Originally, I wanted to enlist right after high school, but they told me that if I wanted to serve I should be an officer."

Currently, Hughes is contracted with a four-year scholarship from the Army. To keep this scholarship, he needs to graduate on time, maintain a 3.0 GPA and sign with the Army for eight years.

"I always knew I wanted to do it, but the scholarship made it the easiest decision ever," Hughes said.

Hughes is a triple-major in finance, accounting and management. In addition to taking four classes to fulfill these degree requirements, he is also required by his program to take a classroom session Tuesdays from 3:20 to 5:10 p.m., as well as a leadership lab Thursdays from 3 to 6 p.m.

To attend these labs, he drives back out

to Greensboro, where he will crawl on the ground, weapon in hand, walk through an ambush, or strategize how to cross a river with a one-rope bridge. Often times, he won't return until 7 p.m., where he has more work to do.

"We have physical training tests once a month," Hughes said. "Instead of having homework for these classes, I need to go to the gym every day."

These additional classes can make scheduling difficult, especially because students in the ROTC program do not have priority scheduling. This semester, Hughes is taking all of his classes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to make this schedule work.

Hughes said the hardest part of the program is balancing it with a college life, especially when his day starts much earlier than the average college student's.

"The college kids' dream is to have all classes starting after 12," Hughes said. "I can't do that. On a Friday morning, I can be waking up when my roommates are going to sleep."

There is a clear distinction between the professional appearance he upholds with his ROTC instructors, using "sir" and "ma'am," compared to goofing around with friends, but he has found a balance. Recently, Hughes pledged with the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity to add more fun to his life.

Hughes said that although he needs to learn information about the fraternity like another class, the brothers are really understanding about his ROTC conflicts.

"Having a group of people that understand what you are trying to do and support you is really nice," Hughes said. "With ROTC, I can't join a lot of clubs. It's nice to go to a place for fun where I don't have to call you 'sir' or 'sergeant.'"

Even though this balance can still be difficult, Hughes said the program's benefits outweigh the challenges.



In addition to being a triple-major, sophomore Austin Hughes is a part of Elon's ROTC program.

"They teach you things you will not learn in the classroom," Hughes said. "I have learned leadership skills, time management skills, communication skills and discipline that will carry over to any job you apply for."

Hughes' suitemates have also learned from his ROTC lifestyle.

"Living with an ROTC student, I have been given a first hand look at just how dedicated the students are and it truly inspires me to live up to that standard of excellence in all aspects of my life," said sophomore Jared Melanson.

Unlike most Elon students, Hughes needs to think about a twelve-year plan, rather than a four-year plan, considering the time he will spend in the army.

Although he will not find out where he will be stationed and what branch he will be in until mid-November, he would ideally like to go into the infantry. Hughes would

lead a platoon of about 40 men, carrying out the orders of a plan on the field. If he says go left, his squad will all go left, no questions asked. However, with a degree in finance and accounting, they might want him to have a desk job in a financial department of the army. Hughes may end up working in finance while in the army because of the amount of money and energy devoted to him through ROTC.

"If they are investing \$200,000 dollars on you, they don't want you getting blown up," Hughes said.

No matter where he ends up, the ROTC program has given Hughes leadership skills he can apply to any situation.

"You really develop your character," Hughes said. "I now have self discipline. When your alarm goes off at 4:55 in the morning, you're the only one who can get yourself up, and you do."

A walking miracle dancing for awareness

Catie Willett
Senior Reporter

Amy Wolf had fluid in her lungs. She had fluid surrounding her heart. And her lymph nodes were enlarged and full of cancerous cells. The Elon University sophomore was only 16 years old in October 2011 when she was diagnosed with Peripheral T-cell Lymphoma.

Growing up, Wolf experienced the toll cancer takes on patients after seeing family members suffer from prostate, bladder and breast cancer.

"You never expect [cancer]," Wolf said. "That's what makes it so scary."

Her own illness was discovered after summer camp her junior year of high school when she spent most of her time in the infirmary with a fever and unexplainable fatigue.

After that summer, weekly visits to the pediatrician became a part of her routine. As she stopped eating, pediatricians attributed Wolf's symptoms to pneumonia or mononucleosis, two diseases with similar symptoms. But after receiving a PET scan, fluid was discovered in her lungs and around her heart.

"When I was in the ER and they were trying to explain what they found, my mom started crying and yelled at the doctor saying, 'You better not say the "C-word."' Wolf said. "But when my mom said that, it clicked that that was why the antibiotics weren't working."

Wolf was admitted to the Children's Hospital at Duke University Medical Center that fall to treat the cancer in her lymph nodes with three-hour infusions of chemotherapy.

"Not being in control was the scariest part of being sick," Wolf said. "My cancer was rare in pediatrics, so I was like a test bunny for the treatment regimen I was on."

Wolf was prescribed two bone marrow transplants, involving her own stem cells for her first transplant, and then a smaller dose of someone else's stem cells for the next transplant.

For her body to accept the cells, her immune system was wiped with high doses of chemotherapy to avoid any attacks on the foreign cells. The second bone marrow transplant was a precautionary measure to prevent the cancer's return. In addition to the two transplants, Wolf underwent endoscopies, line placements, bone marrow checks, radiation and a spinal tap.

Wolf continued her high school education through a hospital teacher who worked with her on assignments. As she remained in the hospital for another year, she was assigned a homebound teacher her senior year of high school.

"I was very set on going to Elon since my freshman year of high school, so I was determined to still attend [school] and graduate with my class," she said.

Although her initial plan was to study business at Elon, after spending time with other cancer patients and having support from the Duke staff, Wolf decided to major

in human service studies. She now plans to pursue a profession as a child life specialist — a career centered on helping sick children develop coping skills through play.

"I have been very focused on becoming a child life specialist because I want to help children who were in the same position I was," Wolf said.

And now she can. In May 2012, Wolf was declared cancer-free.

Wolf recovered at home for a year after the declaration, attending Durham Technical Community College for her first year of college.

"Every day I'm scared of it returning. I never want to relive that time in my life," she said. "I met some amazing people who I would not have met otherwise, but I would never want to be in such a vulnerable place in my life again."

Almost three years later, Wolf has dedicated her time to working with Elonthon, the 24-hour dance marathon organization that works to help raise money for Duke Children's Hospital.

Her role for Elonthon is the role of a Miracle Child, a speaker at Dance Marathons who is a cancer survivor.

"I have heard her speak at Elonthon in the past and always found her story to be inspiring," senior and Elonthon Families

Relation Chair Tessa Kroninger said. "The manner in which she tells her story also is a testament to her positive outlook on life and bubbly personality."

Apart from Elonthon, Wolf hopes to reform the way cancer is viewed on Elon's campus.

"Death isn't the first thing you should think about when you hear 'tumor.' What can I do to help make their experience better? is what it should be," Wolf said. "Dance marathon is a way for people to celebrate any story and is a way to get people involved because there are really sick kids."

Elonthon held its first fundraising event of the year Saturday with an open mic night at The Oak House. The event began official fundraising for Duke Children's Hospital. Performances from the a capella group Shirley Tempos, solo musical acts and stories told by Elon Miracle Child began the night. Wolf concluded the event with a final speech about how dance marathons benefit children's hospitals and her own experiences.

"It's effortless to talk at these events because it's my life. I don't have to memorize facts or look from a script," she said. "But I don't want to get too specific about some of the heavier things because Dance Marathons are all about helping the kids that are sicker than me now. I was in that position once before. I never want to go back."

Wolf has drawn strength from her fear. "It amazes me how far I have come from being so sick to feeling so good," Wolf said. "There have been some bumps in the road, emotionally and physically, but I am stronger because of it, and I want to share my story."

**"I HAVE SPOKEN . . .
BECAUSE I WANT TO
REMIND PEOPLE ABOUT
THE SUCCESS STORIES."**

**AMY WOLF
SOPHOMORE**