

High school student receives "Army Greening Tour" at ARL-HRED's field element at Fort Hood, Texas

June 5, 2012

The U.S. Army Research Laboratory, Human Research and Engineering Directorate (HRED) field office located in Fort Hood, Texas, sponsored an almost three-day visit for a high school student to meet the requirements of her "Senior Project 2012."

Parish Episcopal School in Dallas, Texas, approached Dr. Sam Middlebrooks, Chief of the Fort Hood Field Element, HRED, about hosting a senior high school student as part of her senior class project. The school told Middlebrooks the student has a very strong interest in a military career. She received an athletic scholarship to play basketball at Saint Catherine's in Minnesota, and plans to enroll in Army ROTC at the University of Minnesota this fall.

"It was a very unusual request," said Middlebrooks. "We normally don't set up such a visit for a single person – especially of high school age, but the school told me this student would blow my socks off."

Gabriela (Gabby) Altuna arrived at Fort Hood on Sunday, May 13. After having an initial orientation meeting with Middlebrooks, who was the tour sponsor, and preparing for the events that lie ahead, on Monday, May 14 she met with Dr. (Maj.) Patrick Depenbrock at Darnall Army Medical Center. There she attended a residency lecture with young Soldiers wishing to become Army doctors and later conducted morning clinic rounds with Depenbrock.

"Dr. Depenbrock continued to open my eyes



Dr. Sam Middlebrooks, ARL-HRED, meets with Gabriela (Gabby) Altuna to discuss the "Army Greening Tour" she is about to receive. (courtesy photo - taken by Gabby's mother)



Maj. Patrick Depenbrock, sports medicine doctor at Darnall Medical Center at Fort Hood, is pictured with Gabriela (Gabby) Altuna, the high school student who conducted morning clinic rounds with him. (photo courtesy of OTC staff photographer)"



to the multitude of possibilities that the Army has to offer in the medical field," said Gabby. "All of the different opportunities sounded incredible, but Dr. Depenbrock really caught my attention when he mentioned that as a doctor I would not have to remain in the hospital."

Gabby learned she could go overseas and be embedded into a unit on active duty, and she also learned about the increasing opportunities for women in the military. In addition, she learned that pursuing a career in sports medicine was an option in the Army.

"Who would need a sports medicine doctor on an Army base, right?" said Gabby. "It turns out that most of Dr. Depenbrock's patients are Soldiers who have experienced injury due to physical training (PT)."

Depenbrock wasn't surprised by Gabby's prior thoughts.

"Most people are amazed when they learn of the unique opportunities available to Army physicians," said Depenbrock. "While we need doctors for all segments of the general population, when a smart, motivated, athletic, team-oriented young adult learns that he or she can practice medicine for a population of heroes, and then go jump out of planes, go to dive school, go to Ranger School, and provide direct medical support to combat operations overseas, the prospective experience sells itself."

The next visit was to meet Capt. Megan Burke, chief of operations, for the 21st Combat Aviation Brigade. There Gabby said she got to see a row of Blackhawk helicopters outside on the line, and a row of Apaches, a Huey, and a new model of helicopter inside the hanger.

"The hanger and the line was the coolest and most beautiful thing I have ever seen," said Gabby.

From speaking with Burke, Gabby said she learned more about the benefits of ROTC and the different routes she could take, whether



From (l to r) Gabriela (Gabby) Altuna poses with Capt.

Kelsey Hester (Burke's friend who returned home from Afghanistan the day of the tour) and Capt. Megan Burke, 21st Combat Aviation Brigade following the helicopters tour. Gabby said the hanger and the line was the coolest and most beautiful thing she had ever seen. (I-phone photo)



Shown is Gabriela (Gabby) Altuna sitting in the cockpit of an Apache helicopter. (photo courtesy of OTC staff photographer)



Capt. Victoria Stauffer, company commander, U.S. Army Operational Test Command Headquarters and Headquarters Company, poses for a photo with Gabriela (Gabby) Altuna. Stauffer was Gabby's 'battle

the different routes she could take – whether it's through the reserves, active duty or the National Guard.

buddy' during the physical training exercise. (photo courtesy of U.S. Army Operational Test Command (OTC) staff photographer)

"It was an honor to be asked to show Gabby around the flight line. My goal was to show her a little bit of everything and let her know that I don't get to just 'fly' – there are a multitude of operations I am involved with," said Burke.

Burke added that the timing couldn't have been more perfect as her best friend who was also in ROTC, but took a different route, arrived home from Afghanistan that day.

"I picked her, my best friend, up and took her with Gabby and me so Gabby could see the different routes," said Burke. "Gabby was a spectacular young lady that I hope to see in the future in a military uniform. I wish her the best of luck with her future endeavors."

At the conclusion of the first day of tours, Gabby said she no longer has to worry about whether or not she is fit for the military or not.



Shown is Gabriela (Gabby) Altuna in the Humvee mockup manning a 50 caliber machine gun during her tour at the Warrior Skills Training facility. (I-phone photo)

"One way or another, I want to follow in their footsteps and become an extraordinary individual with a love for what they do. Both Capt. Burke and Dr. Depenbrock said that if given the chance to go through high school and college again, they would have picked the same path they are on right now," said Gabby. "The sacrifices aren't easy, but the reward is great."

On day two, Gabby had the opportunity to tour the Warrior Skills Training facility. The facility houses wooden mock ups of Humvees, command post vehicles and buildings. Each mock up is surrounded by a 360 degree projector screen that displays realistic full motion terrain, villages and surroundings that Soldiers would see in Afghanistan.

There Gabby engaged in a simulated convoy exercise in a Humvee mockup while manning the 50 caliber machine gun on it. Following that, she carried a laser firing pistol into an urban house clearing exercise and engaged various Afghan 'bad guys' while rescuing simulated American hostages.

"I had a blast!" said Gabby as she described her experiences with both simulators.

Day two ended with tours of the 1st Cavalry Division Museum and vehicle displays, and the 3rd Armored Cavalry regiment Museum.

The third and final day began early as she and about 50 Soldiers attended morning PT with the U.S. Army Operational Test Command Headquarters and Headquarters Company. There she met the company commander, Capt. Victoria Stauffer, who would be her 'battle buddy' throughout the PT activities. They started off with lunges, pushups and abdomen work and then completed a four mile run.

"I really enjoyed the PT," said Gabby. "I did a lot better than I thought I was going to do."

Later, a wrap-up meeting was held with Middlebrooks. There they discussed the highlights of the tour and the information she gleaned confirming that a career in the military is what she is striving for.

Gabby plans to follow through with her education in ROTC and college, and then hopes to get a military career in the Army in the aviation or medical field.

"My experience at Fort Hood was incredible and inspiring," said Gabby. "I did not expect it to go this well or as successful as it did. I am thankful to everyone who set this up for me."

"Gabby is a very impressive young woman with the potential for a great career in whatever field she chooses," said Middlebrooks. "The future U.S. Army will be in good hands if individuals such as Gabby choose to become leaders in it. I hope she does."