



Appalachian Challenge Advantage



Kentucky National Guard Youth Challenge Program Academy Newsletter

FTX EDITION

MAY 2026

VOLUME XXVIII ISSUE V

IMPORTANT DATES:

Intrastate Games
13-14 May

Class 28 Graduation
June 13

Class 29 Intake
July 12

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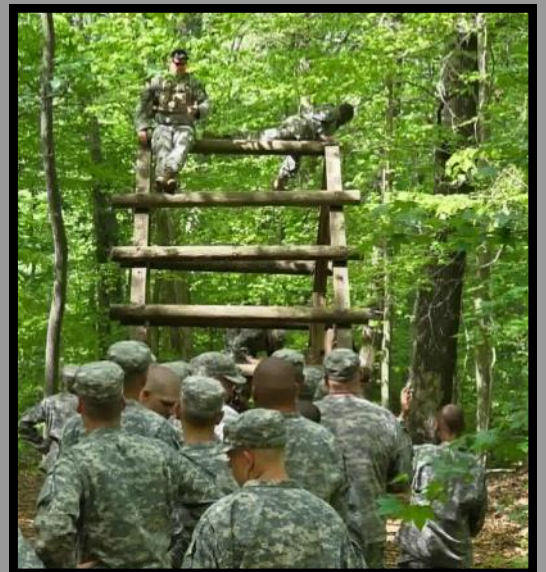
INTO THE WOODS

During Week 16, our cadets participated in a much anticipated milestone of our program—Field Training Exercise (FTX) at the CSM Harold L. Disney Training Center located in Barbourville, KY. This cyclical training offers our cadets a chance to show themselves how they have grown physically and mentally while attending the Appalachian Challenge Academy through a collection of activities meant to put this growth to the test. These activities include their second PT test, a land navigation competition, and a run-through of the obstacle courses provided at the training center.



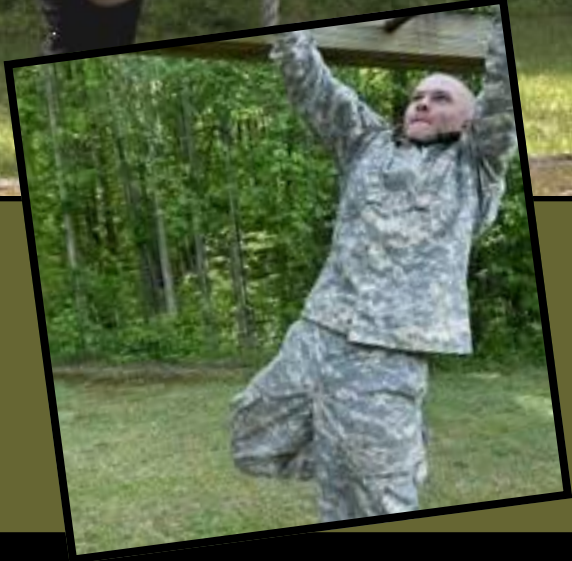
The CSM Harold L. Disney Training Center which consists of over 500 acres of wooded terrain, is used to train National Guard units of Eastern Kentucky. The center is named after CSM Harold L. Disney who served in the military for 38 years, during which time he played an instrumental role in helping the local National Guard units receive effective training and preparation needed in the line of duty at the site named after him in 1974. He retired with numerous accolades that depicted his level of dedication and service to his fellow soldiers (whfrtc.ky.gov/hldtc).

Each cycle when we visit this training facility, it is our hope that the cadets will have the kind of educational and confidence-building experience that the facility's namesake intended. And despite having this event every cycle, we never tire of watching cadets learn that just because something is unfamiliar does not mean it is intimidating, and just because something is challenging does not mean it is impossible. This edition of our newsletter is comprised of the skills and abilities our cadets use to take their FTX by storm and will give you a closer look at what it takes to be a cadet!



AGILITY

Agility is the ability to move your body quickly and easily using a mixture of strength, reflexes, and balance. Cadets practice physical agility during their weekly Commandant Competitions while playing sports such as basketball or ultimate frisbee. These events require hand-eye coordination and dexterity that easily translates to the obstacle courses provided at the Harold L. Disney Training Center.





You're only as strong as your weakest link! — Words that are often said as cadre to encourage comradery in cadets are never truer than during the land navigation competition at their FTX. Platoons are divided into groups and given four points to plot out. Once cadets determine the location of their points on the map and assign roles to their group members, the competition begins! The teams have an hour to find all of their points that are located throughout the training facility's 500+ acres. The race against time and unfamiliar terrain make it the ultimate test of strategy and...

TEAMWORK



Black Hawk



An opportunity that few get is to load up on a Black Hawk helicopter and take flight! That is exactly what Cadets from class 027 got to do. More than just a ride in the sky, it provides a hope within that these young men and women that they can reach heights that they never before thought possible. Opportunity to set aside fears, anxieties, and doubt in order to accomplish great things both now and in their future. The Black Hawk helicopter known for it's reliability and ability to handle a wide range of missions, from troop transport, electronic warfare, aeromedical evacuation, air assault operations, and much more is equipped well for survivability and capability. Our Cadets too are being equipped for a wide range of life missions and, regardless of what they choose to pursue in their life, they are learning the skills to be equipped well for survivability and capability in all their future endeavors.

We look forward to seeing them "take flight" in their lives well into the future!



ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED

Week 17 Promotions



Level 4

MSG

Adams	Foley	Neese	Sullivan, T
Corey	Foley	Pogrotsky	Tieman
Darling	Jordan	Romero	Volker
Dickerson	Krupp	Smith, C	Wallace
Donathan	Neace	Smith, D	Whiting
Dragoo	Neely	Sullivan, C	Worley



Level 3.5

SFC

Conley-Cole	Mardis	Scott	Thacker
Cotton	Mowen	Sexton	Tingle
Davis	Patterson	Sheperd	Walls, G
League	Payne	Smith, W	Warmouth
Lockhart	Ruiz-Taylor	Stephens	



Level 3

SSG

Ackerson	Drake	Kelsay, Bra	Ottesen-Price
Blevins	Hall	Kelsay, Bry	Snyder
Burchett, M	Hammond	Martin	Thompson
Caskey	Hester	Maynard	
Collins	Hiler	McQueary	



Level 2.5

SGT

Allen	Hinkle	Swann
Cook	Russell	Tolliver



Level 2

CPL

Bowers	Cofield	Klopp	Phipps	Walls, K
Caddell	Gohman	Lankford	Schaller	
Coffey	Jones	Peters	Shears	



Level 1.5

PFC

Durham	HunFleet	Starr
Eckler	Pennington	Wilson



Level 1

PVT

Blackburn	Escalante	McMillian	Provence
Burchett, K	Fedders	Perkins	Shalash



Level 4
Master Sergeant (MSG)

Level 3.5
Sergeant First Class (SFC)

Level 3
Staff Sergeant (SSG)

Level 2.5
Sergeant (SGT)

Level 2
Corporal (CPL)

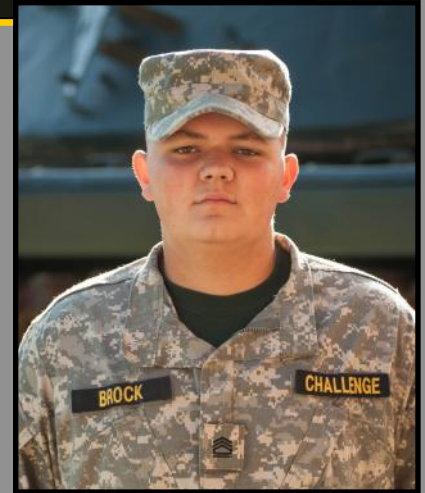
Level 1.5
Private First Class (PFC)

Level 1
Private (PVT)

11 Years Out



Austin Brock is one of our Class 006 graduates from 2015. Austin shares that, “Coming into the ACA I was completely upside down, I had nothing good going for me I was a mess. I hated the ACA from the first day, I hated it for a long time, I was too blind to see the opportunities I passed upon while at the ACA. I didn’t see how that place was trying to help me at the time. Shortly after, I looked back and was disgusted at the opportunities I had while there and didn’t pursue. If you’re behind in school, at risk, or wanting to get ready for the Military, the ACA is definitely the place for you. That place made me grow emotionally, mentally, and physically. It opened my eyes up to the real world. I’m encouraging you to give the Academy a shot, you definitely won’t regret it. Parents if you’re worried or scared, don’t be. Mine was too, reach out to a support group and previous cadets parents and speak with them. I promise, it’s worth it.”



Today Austin Brock is married with kids and a foster parent, he is self employed, likes to fish, enjoys riding, and attends church regularly.

10 years is a great start to a life that went from “being upside down” to one of a man who is actively living a life Right Side Up. We are proud of all of our graduates and truly excited to see how each employ the skills and lessons they found at the Appalachian Challenge Academy.



Recruiting News

Now Accepting New Applications for Class 029

Meet our Recruiting Admissions Team



Rusty Bailey



Dexter Day



Eric Gray



Sarah Lawson

Spring 2026 Orientation Dates

All times are from 3pm to 7pm

Somerset Holiday Inn

50 Stevie Lynn LN

May 26

June 15

London Holiday Inn (exit 38)

506 Minton Drive

May 26

June 16

Lexington Holiday Inn

(exit 108 Hamburg)

1976 Justice Drive

May 27

June 17

Florence Holiday Inn/

Cincinnati Airport

1055 Vandecar Way

May 28

June 18

Williamsburg Hampton Inn

(exit 11)

530 KY 92

May 29

June 19



Rusty Bailey

Cell: 606-344-2900

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Eric Gray

Cell: 606-371-3436

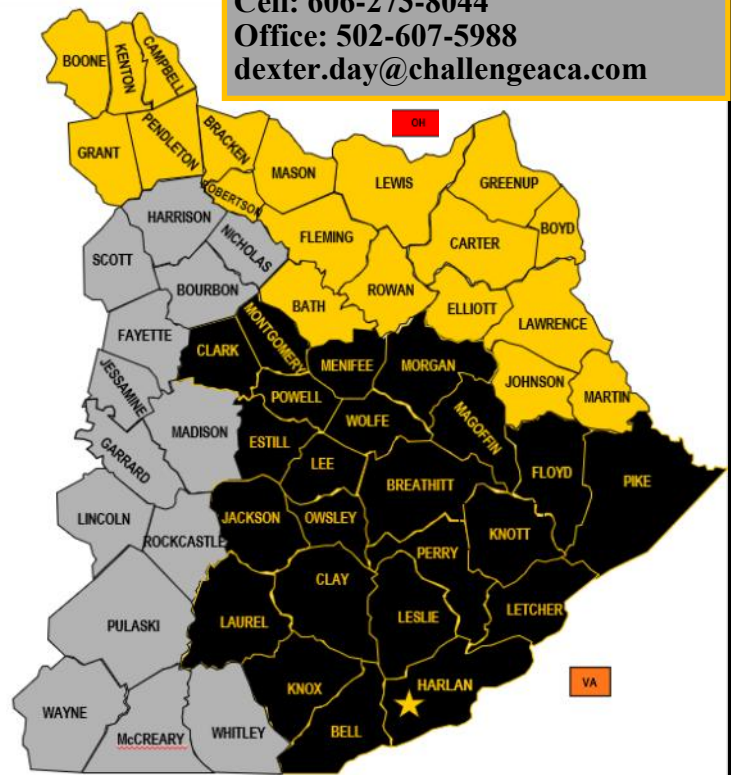
eric.gray@challengeaca.com

Dexter Day

Cell: 606-273-8044

Office: 502-607-5988

dexter.day@challengeaca.com



www.2abetterme.com

admissions@challengeaca.com

**WE'RE NOT TELLING YOU
IT'S GOING TO BE EASY**

**WE'RE TELLING YOU
IT'S GOING TO BE WORTH IT!!!**



ENROLLMENT NOW OPEN



**CLASS 29 STARTS
JULY 12, 2026**

DREAM

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF & NEVER GIVE UP!

BELIEVE

THINK POSITIVE & ALWAYS GIVE YOUR ALL

ACHIEVE

ALWAYS ENCOURAGE & DREAM BIG!

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.2ABETTERME.COM

 **FACEBOOK.COM/ACAHARLAN**

 **INSTAGRAM.COM/ACA4CHANGE**

The Appalachian Challenge Academy is a 22 week, quasi-military program dedicated to advancing foundational development of regional youth. With a focus on 15^{1/2}-18 year olds, it is our goal to provide a diverse skillset through our Eight Core Components that will prepare them to successfully transition into adulthood and create the future they set their sights on. If you would like more information or are interested in joining our community of support, feel free to contact us.

Appalachian Challenge Academy

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admissions@challengeaca.com