

CAP cadets get a taste of military life at camp



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REISTERSTOWN — A row of teenagers stood or kneeled in a line, their semi-automatic weapons pointed at the enemies on the screen before them.

As a civilian auxiliary of the Air Force, adult Civil Air Patrol members don't carry weapons or have military or law enforcement authority, said Bob Thompson, deputy commander of cadets for his home squadron in College Park.

And since they don't carry weapons, there is no need for members to go through military-grade weapon training. But the 161 youths participating in the Civil Air Patrol Tri-Wing Encampment at Camp Fretterd in Reisterstown this week were still allowed to take advantage of the professional video game-like engagement skills trainer with simulated weaponry available at the base.

"We try to give them a nice time," Capt. Charlie Frater said.

Before using the simulated weapons, which are actual guns that have been modified for training purposes, Frater explained to the youths how to properly hold and position the rifles, how to load the magazine, turn the safety on and off, and then gave them their shooting position for each round. Another instructor walked up and down the line, giving tips. At the end of each round, the cadets got to see how they fared. Those who were able to hit more than one target usually let out a little cheer.

The simulated weaponry station was one of several activities the campers took part in Thursday. Some youths got to practice a mass casualty triage exercise, others repelled off a six-story tower, and some took a field trip to Martin State Airport in Baltimore to tour the tarmac and go up in a Black Hawk helicopter. April King, 12, of Finksburg, said the helicopter ride was her favorite part of the camp so far.

"I think it's fun because I'm really interested in being in the Air Force when I'm older," she said of the camp. King said she learned about becoming a Civil Air Patrol cadet when her mother researched Junior ROTC for her online. The cadets allow people join at age 12, she said, so she became a member to get an early taste of where her future could be headed.

"As soon as I got in, I loved doing it," she said.

Justin Ayers, 16, of Reisterstown, is a fellow member of the Westminster squadron cadet program, and also agreed that going up in the Black Hawk was his favorite part of the camp.

Ayers said he wants to be a Marines aviator, and joining the Civil Air Patrol cadets will allow him to get his pilot's license for a lot less cost than through other avenues. He also enjoys participating in community events with the squadron, he said, and he has enjoyed the challenge of attending the basic training-like camp this week. "If you had asked at the beginning of the week, people would have told you they wanted to go home, but by the end of the week, they're going to wish it was longer," he said.

Thompson said the camp is definitely an adjustment for most teens. When they arrived on Sunday, they were stripped of their cellphones, keys, candy and all other contraband. Their mornings begin at 5 a.m., he said, with physical training every morning, as well as bunk inspections to make sure they are keeping up to camp

standards. The squadrons participate in military formations and parades twice a day, he said, and compete in a number of other contests throughout the day as well.

Cadet Angie Auth, 16, of Westminster, said this was her first time at the encampment.

“It’s made me a better cadet and helped me grow as a person,” she said.

With the hot temperatures, long days and continuous activities, the camp would definitely be difficult to get through without the support of her squadron mates, she said.

“We push each other through it and that’s what really gets me through,” Auth said. “It’s definitely been challenging, but it’s definitely an experience I’ve been glad to have.”