



Four PRHS 2017 graduates will be attending the same military flight school

by Jake Wright

PREPARING FOR TAKEOFF

President Biden congratulates Palmer Ridge alumnus Jacob Cheeseman upon receiving his diploma from the United States Coast Guard Academy.
Photo by PA3 Matthew Thieme, USCG Public Affairs



Jacob Cheeseman standing near a Coast Guard helicopter in January of 2018 as a freshman at the Academy.

Four Palmer Ridge 2017 graduates were accepted into the Naval Flight School, a military flight training school in Pensacola, Florida. Jacob Cheeseman, Abigail Bogdovitz, Samantha Jackson, and Claire Graziano may have all gone their different ways after high school, but now, four years later, they will be back together while training to become pilots in the military.

“Sam Jackson, Abby Bogdovitz, and Claire Graziano did Navy ROTC at different colleges and we’ve all kind of come back together again down here at flight school ... it’s cool that we were all fortunate enough to get flight training and to be down here together,” said Cheeseman.

While attending Palmer Ridge, Cheeseman took part in some notable clubs and sports. During his senior year, he was the President of the National Honor Society and he swam for the district varsity swim team. Cheeseman was also on the Bear Truth staff for four years and eventually took on the roles of Co-Sports-Editor and Business Manager.

Cheeseman has had the goal of joining the military since he was a kid. “I had wanted to be in the Coast Guard ever since sec-

ond grade. A lot of people don’t believe that when I say it but we’ve found some things in the house that I drew in second grade about Coast Guards, aviation, and the Coast Guard in general,” said Cheeseman.

He got the opportunity to fulfill this childhood dream when he was accepted into one of the five service academies: the United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) in New London, Connecticut. USCGA was his first choice for college, so Cheeseman had worked towards this goal for all four years of high school.

After going through the Coast Guard’s basic training, called Swab Summer, he was admitted into the Academy and began the four years of the academic and military training program. While at the Academy, he studied Operations Research and Computer Analysis. As for extracurriculars, Cheeseman was an active member of the Aviation Club and the Catholic Community. He also served as a Swab Summer Cadre and a member of the Regimental Staff.

“The experience was very challenging but also life changing. I learned so much and grew as a person. I met friends for life

and had amazing opportunities. The Academy is a place I will always call home,” said Cheeseman.

The President of the United States annually rotates between each service academy for speaking at the graduation ceremony. Luckily for Cheeseman and all of the other Coast Guard cadets graduating in 2017, President Biden was the presiding official and keynote speaker at their graduation. “It was a joyous day to finally reach our goal of becoming Coast Guard Officers. I will always remember taking the Oath Of Office with tears in my eyes ... and being able to exchange a few words with the Commander in Chief was very special.”

Most students at the Naval Air Station are still waiting for classes to start, although, Cheeseman has already participated in a seven-day-long water survival class, and he said that it “was fun to be back in the pool again as a former swimmer.”

Once classes begin, the students will spend the first three weeks in a program called Naval Introductory Flight Evaluation. The cadets will study topics such as engines, aerodynamics, aviation, and weather. During this phase, the cadet



will have typically have classes from 8am to 4pm. The next phase will be to begin preparing for flight and then practicing flying in a Cessna airplane.

After training with the Cessna, they will begin the Primary Flight Training, where they will fly the Navy’s primary training aircraft, the T-6B Texan II. “To train in the T-6, which is a pretty high-performance aircraft, will be pretty fun and to learn how to fly in it. So I’m excited,” said Cheeseman.

This Primary Flight Training will still have ground school for the students to attend to learn the aircraft and to practice in simulators before flying. “We have flights that could be anywhere from starting at 5am to starting in the evening so it’ll be a really variable schedule with a bunch of studying mixed in and practice in between.”

After Primary Flight Training, Cheeseman and the other Coast Guard Officers will move on to Advanced Flight Training, where they will be trained to fly helicopters and six wing training aircrafts.

“I will go back to Coast Guard service after flight school, so I’ll get designated in a Coast Guard aircraft and we’ll go to a course where we learn how to fly the aircraft and then I’ll be a duty-standing pilot in the Coast Guard air station somewhere in the U.S. and we’ll work on getting qualified there,” said Cheeseman.

From top left to bottom right: Cheeseman in his PRHS graduation gown. Cheeseman receiving his acceptance to the Coast Guard Academy at the Coast Guard Academy Museum in New London, CT on November 4th, 2016. Cheeseman standing near a Coast Guard Fixed Wing Aircraft in October of 2019, as a junior at the Academy.

A student’s time-line for graduating from the Naval Air Station depends on the different training that they receive. Cheeseman is expecting to graduate around the summer or fall of 2023. He has a military service obligation because he attended a service academy, so Cheeseman will serve in the Coast Guard for a minimum of thirteen years. He is hoping to be a search and rescue pilot and a law enforcement pilot for most of his adult life.

Cheeseman acknowledges the difficulty of flight school, saying, “It’s certainly a lot of work ahead, I think all of us down here know that. That it’s pretty intense once we get going but it is very exciting and it’s a blessing for sure to be able to have this opportunity to train to be a pilot.”

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Samantha Jackson is another one of the Palmer Ridge graduates who have been accepted into the Naval Flight School in Pensacola, Florida. With Jacob Cheeseman, Abigail Bogdovitz, Samantha Jackson, and Claire Graziano all being reunited in their pilot training, even the sky doesn't seem to offer a limit.

After arriving at Palmer Ridge in 2013, Jackson built up quite the resume. Jackson played for the soccer team and competed in Speech & Debate and DECA. Jackson was also the Vice President of the National Honor Society, with Jacob Cheeseman as the President.

"I was very happy to learn that Jacob was coming to Pensacola! We haven't talked much since graduation but it's cool to see how our paths will keep crossing throughout our military careers," Jackson said.

She had nothing but fond memories of her time on the NHS Executive Council. "I had a great team that made it so the work we had to complete was never too difficult."

As for playing soccer at PRHS, Jackson said, "I loved being on a team and having a common goal."

Much like Cheeseman, Jackson also had the goal of joining the military from a young age. "I just kind of decided on it when I was nine years old. I just read this book, 'Valor of the Navy Seals,' and I was like 'this sounds so cool' and then I stuck with it. Mostly I'm really thankful for the life I've been able to live and I think I just wanted to try and give back as a way of saying thank you."

"This is the best way I came up with to do that," said Jackson.

Jackson has wanted to be in the Navy since the age of nine, but she, "really didn't know exactly what I wanted to do in the Navy. I didn't decide that until my last year of College."

After spending her whole life in Monument, Jackson "just wanted to experience something different." Jackson graduated from Palmer Ridge in 2017 and then she attended Louisiana State University (LSU) for four years. She joined the Navy ROTC program at LSU, which required her to show up to her unit around 5:30am every weekday for either physical training, drills, or a lab in which the staff would teach the students different things about the Navy. Usually, the students were done with unit activities by 9 a.m.. She took on more responsibility throughout college and spent a lot of time working on projects for her unit. This led to her becoming the Midshipman Commanding Officer.

Jackson graduated with a degree in Political Science with a minor in Business Administration. "I decided to study political science mostly because I wanted to understand more about the world and why different countries interact the way they do. My goal was to understand some of the conflicts that I will probably be taking part in as a Navy pilot. And as for business, I

hope to run my own business whenever I retire from the Navy."

Having four graduates from the same high school at the same flight school is not a common occurrence: "Apparently it's pretty unique. There aren't a lot of people who are at flight school with other people from their high school," said Jackson.

Currently, Jackson is waiting for classes to begin. Once they begin, Jackson will be going through the same first few training programs every student takes until the training becomes more specialized. The students will primarily be in the classroom from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. every weekday, much like a typical school day.

"It's really not exciting at first. Just a lot of sitting in the classroom and them throwing a ton of information at us and we have to memorize it all. It really sounds like a bunch of work," said Jackson.

Being the determined person that she is, Jackson is more than ready for this challenge if it means she gets to fulfill her goal and become a Navy pilot.

After flight school, Jackson will be obligated to serve in the Navy for a minimum of eight years, but she is planning on making the Navy her career. "I'll probably just be in the Navy for as long as they'll have me or until they kick me out," said Jackson.



Clockwise starting at top left: Jackson right before taking off as a passenger on her first ever Navy helicopter flight. Jackson's first in-person salute on the day she was commissioned. Jackson's last day of summer training at Camp Pendleton. Jackson with her parents in front of Memorial Oak Grove. All photos provided by Jackson