

Cadets and crew gathered in front of an MH-65D Dolphin at the Virginia Tech Airport prior to the Hokies' football game against the University of Miami in October 2011.



## The Corps' new relationship with the U.S. Coast Guard

by Maj. Carrie Cox, Corps executive officer

Part of the Coast Guard Auxiliary University Program, the Coast Guard detachment at Virginia Tech continues to gain steam, thanks to the efforts of several members of VPI Company in the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets (VTCC).

A seaman in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve, Justin Hunts '12, who graduated in December 2011, is well versed in the history and current state of Virginia Tech's Coast Guard detachment. Having helped the Corps create this new path to uniform service, he hopes to complete the application process for Coast Guard Officer Candidate School (OCS).

*The Coast Guard Auxiliary University Program began in 2008 at the College of William & Mary and has since grown to*

*include six schools nationwide, including the unit here at Virginia Tech. Robert Pol '10, a Coast Guard Reservist currently deployed to the Middle East who will complete his degree in mechanical engineering upon his return, transitioned a loosely organized group of cadets interested in the Coast Guard into an official unit in the Coast Guard Auxiliary University Program while he was a senior.*

*Pol handed the program to me a year and a half ago. In that time, we have established a detachment with the local Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla and receive training in first aid, navigation, marlinspike, and seamanship. We also provide a service to our community by aiding with patrols on Claytor Lake [in nearby Pulaski County]*

*and helping with boater safety courses.*

*Our program has grown to include five "veteran" members and has just processed the paperwork on four new members. In the last few years, the Coast Guard Auxiliary University Program has grown and consolidated to include a common curriculum among schools. The program also provides the opportunity for students to take part in internships with the Coast Guard and to go on summer projects similar to the Navy's cruises.*

*The entire Coast Guard Auxiliary University Programs branch was awarded the Commandant's Award for Innovation at the Coast Guard Expo in Tampa, Fla., in October 2011. I was privileged to be selected to attend and represent our program*

here at Virginia Tech. While there, I spoke to many flag officers about the growth, development, and future of the program and met many Virginia Tech—and Corps—alumni, including National Commodore James Vass '64.

The goals of our detachment include forming a unique group within VPI Company in order to become more like an ROTC unit—even though scholarships are not available—and to begin more-structured training and a unique physical training program that includes swimming. The function of the detachment at Tech, at least in my eyes, is to create a pre-commissioning program that will strengthen the résumés of anyone wanting to apply for OCS or the Direct Commissioning Program.

Last fall, a highlight for the Coast Guard detachment was the Corps' partnership with U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Atlantic City, N.J., to conduct a military flyover with a MH-65D Dolphin prior to the Virginia Tech football game against the University of Miami on Oct. 8, 2011.

The crew on the aircraft was comprised of aircraft commander Lt. Charles Clark '95, U.S. Coast Guard, who earned a degree in human nutrition, foods and exercise from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in 1999; Lt. Jay Kircher, U.S. Coast Guard, whose brother Jeff is a member of the VTCC Class of 1994 and earned a degree in psychology from the College of Science; Petty Officer 1st Class Mike Lewis, U.S. Coast Guard; and Petty Officer 2nd Class Calvin Huckins, U.S. Coast Guard.

Prior to the flyover, the unit also conducted an orientation session and flights for cadets interested in pursuing a career in the Coast Guard. Cadet Thomas Dunlap '12, who is serving as VPI Company executive officer for the spring semester, had a phenomenal experience.

Three cadets and I were given a fantastic opportunity to visit a Coast Guard helicopter and its crew earlier this semester. Over the course of the presentation, we received a thorough tour of the helicopter, both inside and out.

We were allowed to sit in the cockpit and were given a brief explanation of the controls; I found this fascinating. When the tour was concluded, we were each given a ride in the helicopter, two cadets at a time. This was the highlight of the trip.

From the moment the helicopter started moving, I remembered what I have been striving to achieve since I was a boy. It's always been my dream to fly in the armed services, and this visit magnified the dream, giving me a newfound yearning to attain it.

For the flight, the two of us were allowed to choose between the co-pilot seat and the seat in the back with the rescue diver. I thought at the time that I had drawn the short straw when I had to sit in the back. However, being able to move around and lean out the side of the helicopter to see Blacksburg below was a truly invigorating experience. I felt like I was 13

years old again at my first Blue Angels show although the helicopter flight was much better.

The attitudes and character of the Coast Guard crew were exemplary. From the very beginning, they were excited, courteous, and patient with the many questions we had.

This experience is one that I will cherish for the rest of my life. I truly believe that if all cadets were given a similar experience within either their respective branch or the Coast Guard, it would instill in them a newfound fire and aspiration to accomplish their goals. Being so close as to tangibly feel the dream was truly a privilege and an amazing experience for me.

In both numbers and structure, Virginia Tech's Coast Guard detachment has grown considerably during the last few years. Cadet initiative, along with a strong partnership with both the National Coast Guard Auxiliary and the volunteers in the local flotilla, has allowed the program to develop into a viable training opportunity for those cadets who dream of futures serving in the U.S. Coast Guard.



Justin Hunts '12 (second from right) attended the Coast Guard Expo in Tampa, Fla., in October 2011.