



C3C Tim Park bows to C2C Dalton Miller. The room falls silent as the two cadets square off on the mat, their bodies clad in protective sparring gear. The moderator gives the signal and the match begins. Both cadets move with fluid motion, reacting to one another's footwork. In an instant they banter back and fourth with a series of spinning kicks. The cadets trade blows and the sound of bone clashing against body armor fills the room as they leap, kick and parry. In the next moment the match is over; the two bow and then return to the ranks of the cadet Taekwondo students to begin the next training session.

C3C Samantha "Salty" Saltamachia is the cadet in charge. Three time Junior National Amateur Athletic Union Team member and USA Junior National Taekwondo team member, she's

The Way of Fist and Foot

traveled the world, fighting in both the German and the Dutch Open. "Taekwondo is very important in my life," she explains. "Without it, I wouldn't be where I am today. I'd probably just be some slob sitting on my butt in a dorm room at a state college. The sport gives you a competitive drive that you can't get anywhere else. There's a lot of discipline involved because you're constantly training and fighting. You stay with your coach and you learn to listen. It's an overall well rounded sport."

Salty is among two other Taekwondo veterans—cadets Park and Miller—who run practices at the Academy. ▷



Cadets take on daily sparring matches under the guidance of the upperclassmen.

Cadets practice the art of Taekwondo

Written and Photographed by Lewis Carlyle



“The club is 100 percent cadet instructed,” she says. “We all take time out of our schedules to come down here and train and everyone here is passionate about doing this. Our days are filled, so, taking an hour and a half can be a really big deal, because we don’t have time to spare.”

C4C Alexander Hooks is one of several doolies in the club. A three-year practitioner of the sport, he is a first degree black belt. Hooks admits he still has much to learn, and is thankful that the upperclassmen who mentor the younger cadets have almost 30 years combined experience. “This has been my sport through high school,” Hooks exclaims. “This is something I really enjoy. Here at the Academy when we’re bogged down with school work, I can come down to practice and just have fun, get a good workout and reduce stress.” Hooks describes a long-time interest in the martial arts, with Taekwondo at the top of his list of disciplines to study. “I’d have to say my favorite part about coming down here to train with the club is the sparring. There’s just this adrenaline rush you get.”

Sparring is a long standing tradition among the discipline of Taekwondo. A martial art of Korean descent, its origins reach back as far as 1,300 years ago. The modern practice, however, is relatively new, gaining status as Korea’s official martial art on April 11, 1955. In the past 60 years, the sport has crashed through international boundaries to become one of the most popular disciplines world wide. Like most martial arts, Taekwondo is primarily a defensive practice, designed to improve both body and spirit. It is best known for powerful sweeping kicks and aerial attacks.

Back in the practice arena, the cadets take turns refining their techniques as they kick pads held by the instructors. C2C Dalton Miller is another of the more experienced club members. “I’ve been practicing for a long time,” Miller says definitively.

Below: C3C Tim Park trains with C3C Samantha “Salty” Saltamachia.



Top to bottom: Taekwondo club veterans C2C Dalton Miller (Blue) and C3C Tim Park (Red) face off in a sparring match.

"I started ten years ago with my dad and brother. I've always thought it was a really great sport and I'm happy to be continuing here at the Academy." Like many of the other cadets in the club, Miller echoes the sentiment of discipline that Taekwondo has brought into his life. "It's definitely given me an easier transition into the military lifestyle," he explains. "It's also been a huge asset towards all of the combative classes we take here at the Academy."

Miller brings to light the importance of confidence that every capable war fighter must possess. With Air Force service members continuously integrating into joint expeditionary tasking with Army and Marine groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Long Blue Line is often finding itself in close combat situations with U.S. ground forces. Having the ability to subdue an assailant or even snap an enemy's arm with a precisely placed kick puts officers at a huge advantage should fighting ever resort to hand to hand combat. As cadets in the training arena land barrage after barrage of vicious kicks against the practice pads, one cannot help but think they are doing a great service to themselves and their fellow officers by preparing for what awaits them on deployment.

Given the nature of today's urban warfare, close combat training has never been more important, and the martial arts have been steadily gaining popularity with cadets at the Academy. C3C Tim Park has a unique connection to the art of Taekwondo. "My parents are both native Koreans," he explains, "and Taekwondo is our national sport, so it's always been very important to me. I love the sport and I love the tradition." Park goes on to describe some of the challenges that the discipline demands of its practitioners. "Flexibility is definitely a big one, especially for newcomers.

Mentally, things come down to your level of perseverance; when a person faces his black belt test, you may have to do one hundred pushups, one hundred sit-ups, one hundred kicks—all of these test your mental and physical stamina."

Park explains that the sister service academies always make it a point to organize sparring matches whenever an opposing team is in town for a football game. This year, Air Force plays Army at Falcon Stadium, and the cadets are eager for a piece of the Knights. "West Point is pretty deep-rooted in Taekwondo," Park says. "Our club has been dormant for a long time. We just recently got it up and running again and we're hoping we can do well against Army when we come up against them. It's an Air Force Pride thing," he says with a smile.

Cadet Saltamachia beams with enthusiasm when she thinks of the renewed interest in martial arts among the Cadet Wing. "We're building the club from the ground up at the moment and we have big plans for it. I love the camaraderie! Once you get a team together you're always together. You're always there for each other. We fight together, we sweat together, we bleed together. It's a great way to share with others. Hopefully we can really get the club going and get some notice out there in the collegiate world, so that they'll know we're here and we mean business."

The other cadets in the training arena share Salty's enthusiasm. Each eagerly awaits his or her turn in the sparring ring. It is soon clear that Taekwondo is more than just a sport, it is a way of life, one that many cadets will take into their careers as officers. As the wars overseas continue, it is a sure bet that among the Long Blue Line, this discipline will go on to save many lives. ❑

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