

10 Things I Wish I Had Known My First Year as a West Point Parent: Reception Day (R-Day)

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After much preparation, it was finally time for our son to report to West Point for Cadet Basic Training also known as Beast Barracks. It was one of the most stressful and exciting days in our son's life. He was leaving his "home sweet home" and everyone he loved for an adventure full of unknown challenges. A cadet candidate's first day is known as R-Day which is an abbreviation for Reception Day. Upon reflection, our cadet said R-Day was a big blur to him because so much happened in very little time. Below are 10 things that are helpful to know about the "infamous" R-Day.

- **Try not to miss R-Day but do what is best for your cadet when making your travel plans.** Our cadet is very close to his younger siblings and since they are good travelers all of us went to R-Day with him, which by the way is a family friendly event. If someone in your group might cause your cadet more stress, you might want to reconsider bringing them along. I've also read about both positive and negative outcomes when a boyfriend or girlfriend comes along. Other cadets opted to travel alone to West Point for various reasons and that worked out fine for them as well. Instead those families focused their resources on attending the Cadet Basic Training Acceptance Day (A-Day) Parade seven weeks later. It just depends on your family dynamic and your cadet's comfort level and preferences. It is also important to make sure your travel arrangements include plenty of room for relaxation and unforeseen circumstances. Our cadet was anxious and barely smiled until we got to our hotel in Newburgh, New York. We arrived there two days early, giving him time to wind down from the long car ride and to explore the area. You could see a

huge difference in his temperament once he knew we weren't going to be late for R-Day, especially since we were able to make a couple of practice drives to West Point from our hotel(it's very easy to get lost)! We also ate at the *Orange County Choppers Cafe*, attended the *Thayer Hotel Reception*, purchased last minute supplies, went swimming and made time for him to reorganize and repack. Special note: Since many cadets don't want to worry about being late for R-Day, they prefer to stay at a hotel that is closer to West Point. If you reserve in advance and it is within your budget, the *Thayer Hotel* is ideal.



- **Packing properly for Beast is important-our cadet's top items.** Along with his Bible and the mandatory boots, shoes and proper photo identification, my cadet emphasized that the most important things not to forget were socks & underwear and plenty of them! He then mentioned the 550 Cord which needs to be the right color, the multi-tool and lighters. His journal, stamps, writing supplies and some toiletries were also good to have. He didn't pack his phone, since it wasn't on the mandatory or optional list. Do not take anything that isn't on the approved list and don't over pack, since your new cadet will have to carry everything around with him/her all day long on R-Day. Please refer to the official and very detailed list provided by *West Point* first for proper guidance on what your cadet should pack. As for the rest of the family, proper photo identification will be needed to enter the United States Military Academy grounds. Also make sure to bring comfortable shoes, your camera and in case it rains during the Oath Ceremony(it did for ours)-rain ponchos and umbrellas. Our local parent club, The *West Point Parents' Club of Illinois*, also gave us a very helpful Plebe Parent Handbook that included packing tips for cadets and the rest of the family. The *West Point Parents Class of 2018**(**There is a Facebook page for each Class*), *West Point Moms* and other *West Point* Facebook pages can also be a great resource for this very important task.

- **West Point military police will pull you over.** I'll never forget the nervous young cadet candidate standing next to his parent's car as he waited for the post military police to finish talking to his dad. It was already a stressful morning for everyone but the military police have to do their job, even on R-Day. We ourselves noticed and have heard many others say how easy it is to go past the speed limit on these beautiful campus roads without even realizing it.
- **The "90 seconds (or less) goodbye" is over in the blink of an eye.** After you are in line for a short time, your cadet and family will be led into a section of the Eisenhower Hall auditorium with a small group of other cadet candidates and their families. There will be a very short introduction and presentation and then suddenly the cadet candidates will be asked to say their goodbyes and to quickly form a line against the wall. Before you know it, your cadet either rushes to be the first in line without saying goodbye or he/she quickly hugs only one of you. Don't take it personally. If you are lucky, you'll have the 90 seconds and everyone will get a hug. We probably had 60 seconds if that. Others had less. West Point parents recommend that you say your "real" goodbye before you arrive to Eisenhower Hall at a time that you won't feel rushed.
- **There are plenty of R-Day activities to help ease the sudden separation.** Once your cadet leaves, you will immediately exit through a different door. Right outside this door are many well organized activities that distract you from the sudden separation from your cadet. After getting our free *USAA* "Proud Parent of a West Point Cadet" canvas tote, we got in line to buy the limited edition *West Point Class of 2018 souvenir hats and t-shirts* to give to family and friends as thank you gifts. While in line, you feel an instant connection and have the opportunity to meet many families from all over the country that are experiencing many of the same emotions. After visiting a few more information booths and chatting to many families, we went downstairs to the mail station to get our son's address and company assignment card. That is when we mailed our first letter, which proved to be very important to our cadet. Let family and friends know that your cadet might not have the time to write back but that encouraging and light-hearted letters are very important during Cadet Basic Training. There are guidelines for these letters so make sure everyone follows them so you don't draw unwanted attention to your cadet during that time. We then headed over to the *West Point Association of Graduates Annual Parents* welcome reception for complimentary refreshments and other goodies. After that we participated in one of the many excellent, helpful and interesting historical and informational tours led by West Point leadership and faculty. We even had time to attend a parent prayer service and reception at the *Most Holy Trinity Chapel*. The day goes by fast and there are many other activities to attend, but since our youngest is 8 years old, we did go

back to the hotel for a little R&R and then returned in the early evening for the very memorable Oath

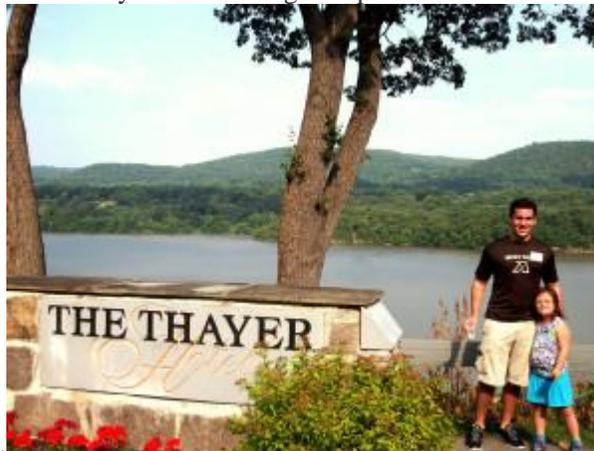


Ceremony.

- **The Oath Ceremony is impressive.** Bring your camera and make sure you know your cadet's company assignment. Then seat yourself in the bleachers accordingly. It is during this swearing in ceremony that your Cadet Candidate officially becomes a New Cadet. This is also the last time you might have a chance to get a glimpse from afar of your cadet before you head back home. We couldn't believe the transformation that took place in just one day. Marching in unison and in uniform with male cadets sporting freshly shaved heads and female cadets in shorter hairstyles, we never could find our new cadet but we knew he was in there somewhere. After this, we relied on the West Point Facebook groups and other sources to learn about what he was doing and to "try" to find him in one of the many posted pictures that are taken throughout Cadet Basic Training.
- **A communication plan is important and should include email preferences and ooVoo.** You are never sure when your cadet will have the opportunity to contact you during Beast so you'll have to be on call *almost* 24/7. You won't know what phone your cadet will be using either, so you'll be answering calls from unknown sources that sometimes appear to be from a telemarketer. Therefore it is best to discuss before R-Day which phone number your cadet should try first and what to do if he/she doesn't reach you. Should your cadet try again, try a different number, leave a message or do all three if time permits? If there is a girlfriend or boyfriend involved or two sets of parents it could get a little tricky, but if you have a plan in place it will be less stressful for your cadet. We were fortunate that we didn't miss any of the calls that were allowed for our West Point Class of 2018. It helped that there was advance notice from West Point about one of the calls and that the moment other parents received their calls they posted it on Facebook. Not having a cell phone can make things even trickier for Acceptance Day(A-Day) which is seven weeks later. Let your cadet know what email address you'll have access to during travel to A-Day since the new cadets usually set up their computers right before then. Our son (who didn't have his phone yet and was not comfortable asking to borrow one) was able to send us an email about a last minute ice cream social that his company was hosting the night before A-Day. At the time he emailed us we were

already on our way to New York from Illinois. Thank goodness I had recently set up my email to my own phone and we were able to get the message. The official video chat program that cadets are allowed to use on their computers is ooVoo. You might want to get that app on your phone as well just in case your cadet has time to set up an ooVoo account before A-Day.

- **Expect possible injuries during Beast Barracks.** Even with the recommended physical fitness and heat acclimatization training your cadet practices prior to R-Day, there will be injuries during Beast. Not for every cadet but for many. One parent found out that her cadet was injured from a picture that was posted on Facebook. There he was, smiling but in a cast. In this case, the cadet didn't want his mom to worry so he asked the doctors not to call her. Since they are adults, West Point is not required to contact a cadet's parents. If you want to be kept in the loop, discuss it with your cadet before you leave to R-Day and explain to him/her why you feel it's important to be contacted about an injury or other important matters especially during Beast Barracks and their first year as a plebe. If your cadet agrees, he/she will need to give the proper authorization so that you have the right as parents to be contacted when there are injuries



or for other circumstances.

- **There are more travel opportunities than you realize for you and your cadet.** There are many travel opportunities in your cadet's first year at West Point that include R-Day, A-Day, Parent Weekend October, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Parent Plebe Weekend March, Spring Break and other holiday weekends. This led me to sign up for hotel and airline reward programs that were best for these particular travel opportunities. Knowing about these travel opportunities also made the time my cadet was away for Beast much more bearable. The various West Point Facebook groups and the Plebe Parent Handbook from your local chapter list hotel and travel recommendations to suit everyone's budgets and needs.
- **West Point wants your cadet to succeed.** Although not everyone will make it through Beast or their four years at West Point, most will because the leadership at West Point really does want your cadet to prevail. There are many quality resources available to help your cadet including counseling services. It also helps that

everyone we met there was friendly, helpful and respectful including the officers, faculty and the students. In my opinion, it is one of the safest and most beautiful Universities in the nation.

Every family is unique so your experiences will vary. Talk to other parents, attend your local parent club welcome sessions, reach out to the official West Point parent liaison and check out the various West Point social media groups and Web sites for more information. The most important thing to do is to make beautiful memories, stay positive and remember that there are many resources available to help your family and cadet during this important part of your West Point journey.

Now Available: 6 Things I Wish I Had Known My First Year as a West Point Parent: Acceptance Day (A-Day)

Previously: 5 Things I Wish I Had Known My First Year as a West Point Parent: The Appointment Letter

Please note: These are not the views of the United States Military Academy at West Point. These are my personal observations, recommendations and opinions to hopefully help parents during this important time in their lives.