
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Diet Secrets of the Tupperware Man Vol. 2

Original Firebreather Greg Amundson draws a correlate between physical and mental nutrition.

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All images: Staff/CrossFit Journal

In December 2003, in lieu of a traditional CrossFit WOD, Coach Glassman gathered the 6 a.m. "Team Six" athletes around the whiteboard for a lecture on the theoretical development in the hierarchy of an athlete. This lecture, like most of the conversations, seminars and interactions I had with Coach Glassman, proved to be life changing.

Coach explained that if he intended to forge the ultimate athlete, he would start with nutrition. Coach believed that nutrition was so important in the development and sustainment of an athlete that in a perfect world he would put an athlete on an island for 30 days with nothing to do except eat the right way. During a previous lecture from Coach in February 2002, I had learned that by “eat the right way” Coach was referring to a special balance of 40 percent carbohydrate, 30 percent protein and 30 percent fat that would yield a balanced hormonal response in the athlete and ultimately result in leaner muscle mass and increased athletic capacity in the gym.

(For a detailed description of the author’s experience with the Zone Diet, read [Diet Secrets of the Tupperware Man](#).)

Coach provided several compelling reasons for the focus on nutrition. The first was a simple rule he called the “1 to 23 Rule.” Coach proposed that most athletes train in CrossFit approximately 1 hour a day. This left 23 additional hours during the day in which the athlete would have to make a choice: would he or she use the time outside the gym to support or unravel the hour that had been invested while inside the gym?

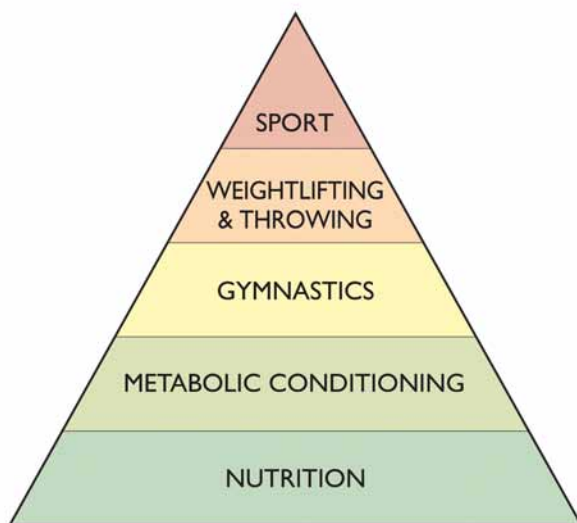
Coach proposed the best way to support the invested hour was with nutrition. After all, with the recommendation of the Zone Diet, most athletes would eat between four and six times during the day. This simple ratio of time spent

training to time spent eating was compelling enough for me to realize that making conscious choices about my food intake was absolutely essential in my development as an athlete.

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What will you do with the other 23 hours outside the gym?

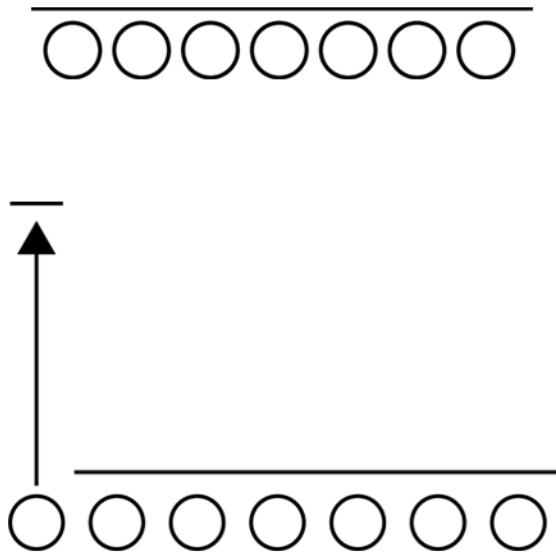
The second example Coach used was referred to as the “Glass Ceiling Rule.” In this example, Coach used my personal experience and the experiences of the other athletes from Team Six to make his point. Coach drew seven circles in a row on the whiteboard and explained that each circle represented one of the athletes of Team Six. He reminded us of our accomplishments and ultimate plateau in the gym only one year before. Indeed, each of the athletes had seemed to reach an invisible ceiling, and our performances in the gym had all tapered off. We were finishing the WODs within a few seconds of each other, with no athlete ever achieving complete dominance over the workouts. Coach had recommended the implementation of the Zone Diet, and I had been the first athlete to use the diet for two weeks with complete accuracy and discipline.



Nutrition is the foundation of the pyramid for a reason.

In just two weeks, I had noticeably increased my athletic performance, body proportions and mental clarity relative to the other athletes who had not yet started the diet.

On the whiteboard, Coach drew an arrow from the circle that represented me straight up so that my circle was now approximately six inches above the other athletes. Coach explained that given the fact that all other variables were constant, my increased athletic performance had been a direct result of my change in nutrition. Coach was indeed correct.



The Glass-Ceiling Rule: If all athletes are equal (top), improving the diet will give one a huge boost in performance.

In just two weeks, I had noticeably increased my athletic performance, body proportions and mental clarity relative to the other athletes who had not yet started the diet. Coach then drew another arrow from one of the remaining six circles straight up, now even with my circle. He explained this circle represented the infamous Brazilian jiu-jitsu world champion Mike Weaver, also a loyal member of Team Six. After witnessing my improvement, Mike had been the next athlete to use the diet—with similar astounding results. Coach then drew arrows above all the remaining circles, explaining that as each of the Team Six athletes started to eat the right way, capacity in the gym dramatically improved.

After thoroughly convincing us of the importance of nutrition as the foundation in the development of an athlete, Coach moved on to the next building block: metabolic conditioning. After an athlete had the right fuel in the body, it was time to start to burn the fuel and get the body systems moving. Metabolic conditioning referred to modalities such as running, cycling, swimming and rowing.

Next in the development of an athlete came gymnastics, and this is where Coach's eyes really lit up. Coach had a deep love and respect for gymnastics, and his definition of gymnastics skills was broad and inclusive. By "gymnastics movements," Coach explained any skill that used the body's own weight as a means of resistance fit his definition. Pull-ups, push-ups, rope-climbing, handstands, squats (body weight and single leg), dips and L-sits were among some of his favorite physical examples of these skills. Coach was adamant that athletes even remotely interested in achieving elite fitness should begin with a solid foundation of being in control of their body in space and time.

Next in the theoretical development of an athlete came weightlifting. The next logical progression once body control was achieved was control over an external object. By weightlifting, Coach referred to compound/multi-joint movements that did one thing: moved a large load a long distance quickly. Again, Coach's voice picked up in excitement and passion as he explained with a mathematical equation the potential for movements—such as a snatch, clean and jerk, and deadlift—to create power that was rivaled only by an animal: a horse!

Coach used me as an example to demonstrate the potential I had to produce power during a workout such as Fran. By measuring the distance my center of mass (my belly button) traveled during the thruster and pull-up (nearly 4 feet per repetition), as well as the distance the 95 lb. barbell traveled per repetition (nearly 6 feet), Coach explained that in approximately 3 minutes of work I would produce and sustain nearly two-thirds of one horsepower. Coach explained that the significance of this power output was that it equaled CrossFit's definition of intensity, and that intensity was "the independent variable most commonly associated with maximizing the rate of return on favorable adaptation to exercise." (That was a direct quote from Coach that I had written in my journal during his lecture that day!)

$$\text{POWER} = F \times D / T$$

One of CrossFit's most important equations.



Amundson found an improved diet clearly equaled increased work capacity.

Finally, after an athlete had built a solid foundation in nutrition, metabolic conditioning, gymnastics and weightlifting, it was time to have some fun and express our newfound capacity in sport. Keep in mind these were the days before the formal development of the CrossFit Games. Coach's belief was that fitness should be expressed by constantly learning and playing new sports. Again, Coach's view of sport was extremely broad: he encouraged his athletes to rock climb, scuba dive, surf, bicycle race, train in martial arts and, of course, continue to achieve more work in less time during the classic CrossFit WODs.

Coach then warned us that at any time our capacity in sport (the WOD or a sporting event outside the gym) should start to suffer or see retrograde performance, we had to immediately return to the foundation and refocus our attention on nutrition. Indeed, nutrition was a direct representation of an athlete's potential for elite performance in any sport or physical endeavor.

I sat on a medicine ball that day in front of Coach and the whiteboard and took pages of notes in my fitness journal. I was captivated by the notion that nutrition would play such a significant role in my development as an athlete. What was most exciting about the prospect of Coach's lecture was that I retained complete control and influence over what I ate during the day. The choice was entirely mine; all it took was conscious decision making every time I sat down to eat.

The Amazing Paradigm Shift

A little less than three months after I heard Coach's lecture on the theoretical development of an athlete, I found myself on a Greyhound bus on my way to Fort Sill, Okla., for Army Basic Combat Training. After working as a deputy sheriff for several years in Santa Cruz, Calif., I felt compelled to serve concurrently in the Army and had decided to enlist in the Army National Guard. As I sat quietly in my seat, several thoughts went through my mind, but the loudest and most constant thought was, "What in the world am I doing in Oklahoma?"

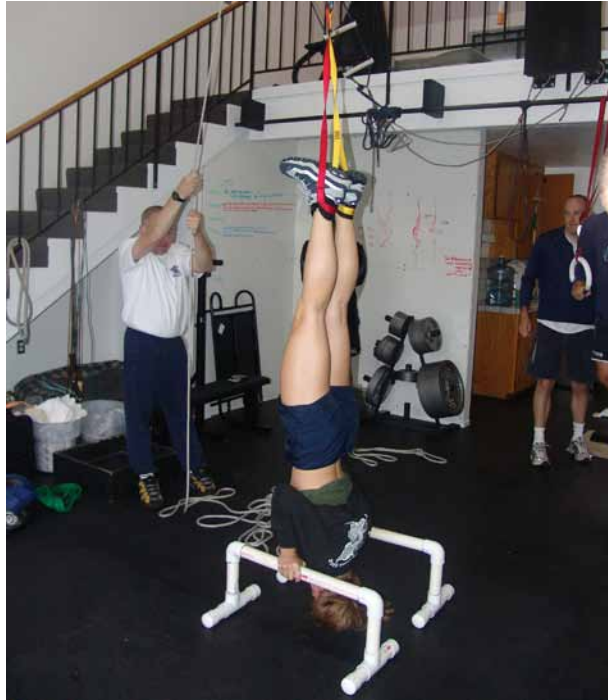
I was 24 years old when I went through boot camp, which at the time was considered "old" for initial training and enlistment. On the bus with me on that lonesome drive were 17- and 18-year-old kids, some between their junior and senior year of high school, and some having just graduated. I knew the power of staying positive in thought and word from previous life experiences with CrossFit and working as a deputy sheriff, but the other future soldiers apparently did not. On the bus that day I heard a never-ending stream of statements that revolved around fear, anger, depression and anxiety.

**"Your thoughts will become
your words, your words will
become your actions."**

—Staff Sgt. Oliver

Finally, the bus rolled to a stop inside the gates of Ft. Sill. Immediately a sea of drill sergeants surrounded the bus and began taunting us with menacing faces and gestures. Two fierce-looking drill sergeants stormed onto the bus and screamed, "Get off my bus right now and line up on the yellow lines!"

I stumbled off the bus and quickly stood at attention on the yellow lines painted on the cement in front of the barracks. The yellow lines served a purpose, as they allowed new recruits with no military experience to quickly assemble into a formation. Suddenly, my senior drill instructor walked in front of the formation and called the group to attention. I will always remember him and the first few words of wisdom he shared with me and the other future soldiers on that day.



Coach Glassman (left) teaching gymnastics in the original CrossFit box in Santa Cruz.

"Listen up, privates!" said Staff Sgt. Oliver, who would not call us "privates" for nine more weeks until we had graduated boot camp. "Boot camp will be hard enough physically, so don't beat yourself up mentally."

Hearing these words, I leaned in and paid close attention. His advice seemed familiar, almost like something Coach Glassman would say.

"In my Army, I want warriors, and warriors think a certain way," Oliver said. "In boot camp, your thoughts will become your words, your words will become your actions, your actions will become your habits, your habits will become your character, and your character will determine your destiny. And I want warriors!"

The staff sergeant's words resonated with me. I knew he was right: in order to be successful at boot camp, I had to remain positive in thought and word.

That night as I lay in my bunk bed, I could not sleep. I thought about my friends at CrossFit Santa Cruz and all the catching up I would have to do when I got back. I pulled the wool blanket up over my head and turned on my little red-lens flashlight so I would not disturb the guys sleeping next to me. I took out my training journal from CrossFit

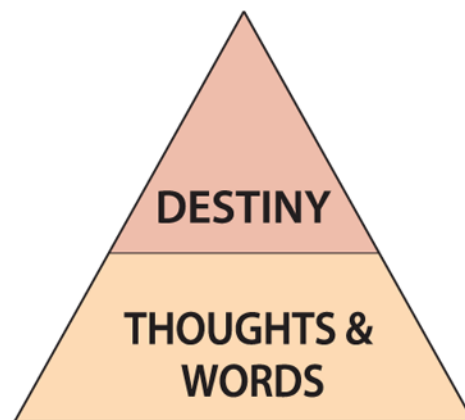
Santa Cruz and looked back over a few months of training data and notes. Suddenly, I came across the lecture and diagram from February in which Coach had drawn the triangle on the white board that explained the theoretical development of an athlete. In an instant I was wide-awake with excitement because I had one of those compelling light-bulb moments.

Looking at the diagram, I drew another diagram next to it. At the bottom, to represent nutrition, I wrote "Thoughts and Words," and then, at the top of the diagram, to represent sport, I wrote "Destiny."

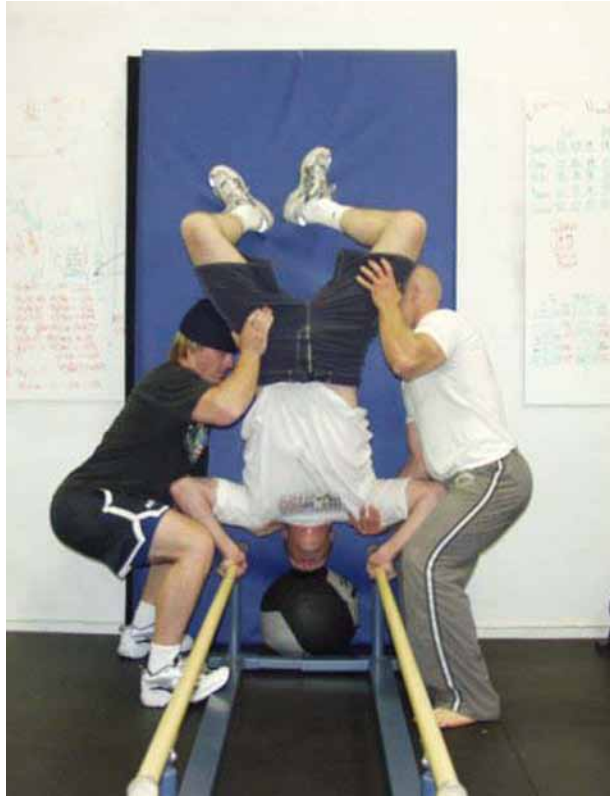
I realized that in the same manner physical nutrition (the foods we eat) are the foundation of our athletic capacity, mental nutrition (our thoughts and words) are the foundation of our development as we strive to achieve our greatest self, both inside and outside the gym.

Thinking the Right Way

The Zone Diet, which Dr. Barry Sears introduced in his first book in 1995, is his term for proper hormone balance. He says that a 40-30-30 caloric balance of low-glycemic carbs (mostly fruits and vegetables), low-fat protein and fat has several great effects on the body. These include the release of moderate amounts of the hormones insulin and glycagon, resulting in the release of a flood of feel-good chemicals called eicosanoids, which do a bunch of good things: protect your heart, open the bronchi of the lungs and reduce inflammation. A secondary effect of importance to CrossFit athletes is noticeable fat loss and increased physical capacity.



Amundson discovered that "mental nutrition" helped him achieve his greatest potential.



Whether you think you can or you can't, you're right.

The important consideration that's often overlooked in the Zone Diet (or any diet for that matter) is choice. Every time we put food or beverage into our mouth, we are faced with a choice: will our physical nutrition support or unravel our investment of time in the gym? The best food choices in the world are good for us only in theory until the moment they are consumed. It is the conscious act of choosing and consuming the right physical nutrition that ultimately makes a positive difference in our lives.

Like most of the lessons of the CrossFit gym, I strive to draw a correlate between what is true inside the gym and what is true outside the gym. I realized with Oliver's mentorship that our thoughts and words are the nutrition of our lives and ultimately determine who we become and what we are capable of achieving.

Just like in our physical nutrition, which consists of three broad types of food in protein, carbohydrate and fat, with mental nutrition we have three broad types of thinking and speaking that can take place: Empowering Words, Mantras and Affirmations.

Empowering Words, Mantras and Affirmations

Empowering Words: Choosing the Right Mental Nutrition

When we prepare a meal, we have a choice about the types of carbohydrate we will consume. Although both cookies and apples are considered carbohydrate, we understand the benefit of choosing the apple instead of the cookie. Individual food choice is important, and we benefit from increased health and wellness when we choose the right foods. In this same manner, we have an opportunity to choose empowering words to consume as well. Refer to the list below:

Hard vs. Challenging

Injury vs. Resilience

Lazy vs. Determined

Weak vs. Strong

Sick vs. Healthy

Some of the most empowering words available for CrossFit athletes to "consume" are the 10 words associated with the general physical skills we train for in the gym. Although normally associated with physical fitness, each word also holds an important definition related to character development and the person we become outside the gym.

Endurance

Mental skill: The ability to maintain belief in self and others.

Stamina

Mental skill: The ability to create and maintain intense mental effort, focus and resilience.

Strength

Mental skill: The ability to maintain resolve of decision.

Flexibility

Mental skill: (1) The ability to independently choose an emotional reaction to a wide range of external circumstances. (2) The ability to apply versatile methods to the accomplishment of a fixed goal.

Power

Mental skill: (1) The ability to encourage self and others in the pursuit of a worthy goal. (2) The ability to immediately generate an intense state of motivation and positive expectancy.

Speed

Mental skill: The ability to make immediate command decisions in the face of opposition, challenge and uncertainty.

Coordination

Mental skill: The ability to invoke the most productive emotional response at a given time and place.

Speed Mental skill: The ability to make immediate command decisions in the face of opposition, challenge and uncertainty.

Agility

Mental skill: (1) The ability to support the needs of others while ensuring personal goals and challenges are fulfilled. (2) The ability to respond to environment and circumstance with deliberate attitudes and beliefs so as to achieve a desired end state.

Balance

Mental skill: (1) The ability to maintain individual physical, mental and emotional wellness. (2) The ability to maintain a state of mind or attitude regardless of external stimuli.

Accuracy

Mental skill: (1) The ability to set and achieve specific and concise goals. (2) The ability to listen and correctly identify internal thoughts, emotions and energies.

(For more information on the mental adaptation of these words, refer to [Forging Elite Leadership](#).)

Mantras: Developing Healthy Daytime Snacks

Once we have begun to consume the right food, it's time to start designing healthy bite-size snacks. A mantra is a short and concise conscious thought pattern or verbalized statement about something we want to express in the moment. One simple way to achieve this is to add the

words such as "I am" or "I have" before the 10 general physical skills. The beauty of this exercise is we are able to use a short, concise mantra to solicit a response both physically and mentally in the body.

For example, "I am flexible" or "I have endurance."

The one important consideration and rule for developing mantras is to stay in the positive tense. By positive tense, I simply mean to state in the mantra what you want as opposed to what you don't want or lack. For example, "Don't fall" vs. "Strongly hold" and "Don't trip" vs. "Retain agility."

One of the best examples of how easy it is to slip into the negative tense came during a CrossFit Goal Setting Course held in Colorado. One of the athletes in attendance had written on his red Inov8 shoes what he had originally thought was a good mantra. On the left shoe he had written, "Don't" and on the right "Stop." The intent was that during a workout or a long-distance run, he would look down at the mantra on his shoes for inspiration and would see "Don't Stop."

We discussed a more powerful word choice and mantra: "Keep going." With a laugh, he quickly lined through the old mantra and wrote in big bold letters, "Keep going!"



Original CrossFit Santa Cruz athletes training for 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games Regional Event 3?

Affirmations: Building Complete Meals

Once we are consuming the right foods and eating healthy snacks, it's time to begin building complete meals. I refer to the complete meal as an affirmation. Affirmations are statements verbalized in the present tense about positive outcomes we want to achieve in the future. For example:

"I believe in myself and my ability to succeed."

"I am a natural athlete and quickly learn new skills."

"I always give my best effort during a workout and leave it all on the gym floor."

"I encourage myself and others by setting a positive example."

At the same time you are making conscious choices about the physical nutrition of your day, pay special attention to your mental nutrition as well.

The Seven-Day Physical and Mental Challenge

Are you up for a life-changing challenge? This exercise is a practice in awareness and empowering ourselves to make conscious choices. For the next seven days, eat Zone-proportioned meals with only desirable macronutrient food choices. Consciously choose to consume fruits and vegetables as your carbohydrates, lean meats and fish as your protein choices, and monounsaturated fats as your fat choice. Be very disciplined: It's only for seven days, so give 110 percent effort. My recommendation is to prepare your meals in the morning and pack them in Tupperware for the day. Make sure you consume your allotted daily food intake—nothing more and nothing less.

At the same time you are making conscious choices about the physical nutrition of your day, pay special attention to your mental nutrition as well. Only consume positive words, mantras and affirmations during the seven-day challenge.

Here are the rules of the challenge:

With physical nutrition, there is no cheating allowed! Beverage choices are water, tea or coffee. No sugar to be added to the beverages, and extra cream, milk or half-and-half all "count" and must be factored into total allotment of daily food intake. If you have an undesirable meal, snack or piece of food, you must return to the beginning of the seven-day challenge.

With mental nutrition, there may be a tendency to briefly entertain a negative word or thought pattern. If this happens, first take a moment and congratulate yourself for having awareness of your thoughts. Next, immediately stop the pattern and substitute a positive word or statement for the negative one. Here is how this might play out.

Statement: "I keep getting hurt." Three seconds later comes the thought, "Whoa! I don't really mean that!" Then replace the negative statement with, "I am resilient and healthy."

If you were able to quickly replace the negative with the positive, continue onward with the seven-day challenge. These moments will come less and less, and you will become more and more aware and conscious of the thoughts and words you entertain and vocalize. If, on the other hand, after you verbalize or entertain any negative thoughts and continue down that dark road with thoughts or words like, "I must not be a good athlete" or "My luck is always down" or "Everyone is stronger than me," you must go back to the beginning of the seven-day challenge.

Final rule: the physical and mental challenges run simultaneously. If you restart in one, you must restart in the other!

An Empowering Consideration

When I started my CrossFit training, neither the CrossFit Games nor the sport of fitness had been fully developed. I felt no rush to achieve elite athletic capacity overnight and embraced the idea that CrossFit training was for life. I took a "longevity" approach to my training, and I understood that on my journey as an athlete and coach I had a lifetime of learning opportunities. This relieved a lot of pressure and helped me to enjoy the process of my development more than a hard attachment to any one specific outcome.

In my travels as a coach and during conversations with athletes at the CrossFit Goal Setting Trainer Course, one of the themes I hear is a sense of urgency to achieve success and dominance in CrossFit (or business, relationships, school, etc.) overnight. This self-imposed and completely illusionary time limit may actually hinder development and take away from the simple joy of the moments we spend in the gym.

Coach Glassman told me the day I started CrossFit that I would see 10 years of adaptation. My training journal is a testament to the wisdom and truth of Coach Glassman's statement. After nearly 12 years in CrossFit, I continue to refine my nutritional intake, improve my metabolic conditioning and enhance my gymnastic and weightlifting technique and ability, and I continue to set personal records in the gym along the way! And, most importantly of all, my love for the expression of fitness in sport or any other endeavor both inside and outside the gym remains constant.



Amundson, left, in a classic shot from the early days of CrossFit.

Whether you are one week or several years into your CrossFit training, remember the original intent for the creation of the program: To develop ourselves both mentally and physically so that we may forge elite fitness for the rest of our lives.



Mike Warkentin/CrossFit Journal

About the Author

Referred to by his peers as the "Original Firebreather," Greg has been training CrossFit for over 11 years. He owns the affiliate [CrossFit Amundson](#) in Santa Cruz, Calif., and is the founder of the [CrossFit Goal Setting Trainer Course](#). He is a Reserve Law Enforcement Officer in Santa Cruz and serves in the Army National Guard as an Instructor of CrossFit and leadership at the California Army National Guard Officer Candidate School (OCS).