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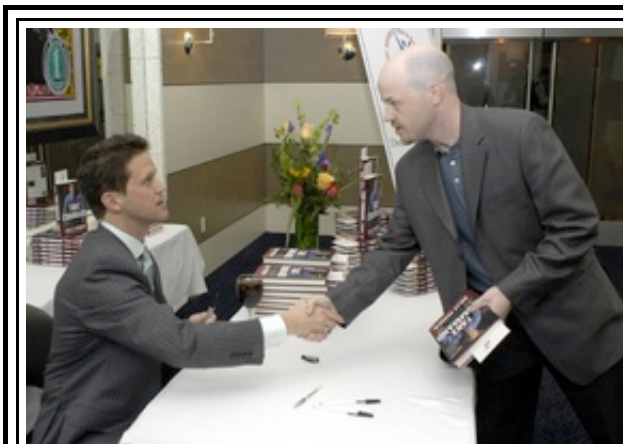
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By Paul X. Rutz

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 16, 2006 – Kelly Perdew was hired as Donald Trump's "Apprentice" in 2004, and he believes his training at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point helped him win the reality TV competition.



Kelly Perdew (left), winner of the TV show "The Apprentice," shakes the hand of a fan after autographing his newly released book, "Take Command," during his book signing in Washington Feb. 15. Perdew is a former Army intelligence officer and Ranger, as well as a West Point graduate. Photo by William D. Moss (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

Perdew, whose new book, "Take Command," extols the virtues of military training, was here yesterday to sign the book and talk about his continuing connection to the military. Five percent of proceeds from the book's sales will go to the United Service Organizations, and Perdew appears as national spokesman for the National Guard Youth Foundation's Challenge program.

The nationwide program intervenes in the lives of at-risk youth, ages 16 to 18. The program's 17-month course combines military style training and mentorship to help its cadets become productive adults.

"The military has been an incredible impact in my life," Perdew said. And

he has seen it work for others. "I've watched it impact three of my four younger brothers," he said. "It turned them into great young men." He said one brother is a former naval aviator, another is a current Navy petty officer, and the third is an Army officer.

Perdew said the most important lessons he learned at West Point included good habits in time management and the combination of duty and integrity that has helped fuel his work ethic ever since.

Some lessons came easier for him than others, he said.

"What I had to work on the most in terms of these is flexibility, being able to have the most varied responses in any given situation," he said. "I think that comes -- one -- with getting older and understanding that different things work in different situations, and -- two -- trying to use all the different elements of the things that I've learned ... to

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see what doesn't work and what does work, kind of trial and error."

After he left the Army, Perdeu became an entrepreneur, starting a media company, among other ventures. Then came his chance on the national stage.

"I got asked time and time again after winning 'The Apprentice,' do I think that my military background helped me win the show and in my other business endeavors," Perdeu said. "Basically the book is a response to that question."

Perdeu said he wrote the book for three reasons: To show corporate America the "a huge pool of leadership talent" in ex-military people; to reassure the 190,000 people who leave the military every year that they have what it takes to be successful in civilian life; and to make it clear that a person does not have to enter the military to become a good leader.

Giving back to the force that helped him mature is also important, he said.

"I feel extremely fortunate that 'The Apprentice' and all the exposure it got me gave me this kind of quasi-celebrity status, where I could help out some of the organizations that I think are most important," he said.

Perdeu became spokesman for the National Guard Youth Foundation after meeting some board members while he was here for the president's inauguration in January 2005. He started working with the group and has addressed the media, spoken with members of Congress and attended special program events to support the effort.

Since its inception in 1993, the foundation has graduated more than 62,000 young people from 30 program sites in 25 states and Puerto Rico, said Greg Sharp, the group's president. Sharp said he hopes to expand the program to all 50 states as soon as possible.

Eighteen-year-old Deborah Trotter, one of four cadets attending the event, has spent five weeks so far at Freestate Challenge Academy in Aberdeen, Md. She said her brother and cousin had gone through the program before her, and she was impressed with who they became, thanks to the rigorous schedule.

The residential phase of the program lasts 22 weeks, Trotter said. During the first two weeks, "they test ... how strong you are mentally and physically, and then after that, you go into the extra program phase, and you start your classes and your activities."

Activities include basketball, chess, choir, military drill and triathlon.

Classes last 20 weeks, she said, and most students finish the residential phase with a GED or high school diploma, after which they go back into the community, meeting once a week over the next year with a mentor who keeps them on track to meet their goals.

Trotter said she applied to the school online and was invited to take math and reading tests before she was accepted. Her life plan now includes service in the Air Force or Navy after she graduates June 17. If military service doesn't work out, she wants to go to a community college, then transfer to a university.

Maryland National Guard Sgt. Michael Coleman, a member of the cadre that trains these cadets, said he strikes a balance with them between military firmness and understanding.

"I have what I call an open door policy," he said. "Any time they're upset, I take them aside, say, 'What's going on?' That's a part of my job, as well as giving them that hard instruction."

He said, most of the kids he sees only need a chance to be proud, to learn to work as a team, and they make impressive gains.

"It's really good to work with them," Coleman said. "They always come back and talk to us, 'I'm in college,' things like that. The 90 percent that we graduate, they do well."

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Kelly Perdew, center, poses with cadets in the National Guard Youth Challenge Program Feb. 15. The cadets, from left, are Derek Brown, Derrick Anthony Derew, Shannon William and Deborah Trotter. Perdew is the spokesman for the program, which offers at-risk kids an opportunity to succeed as adults. Photo by William D. Moss

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