



Whitney Martin - THE BATTALION

Senior forestry major Gordon Davis spends time at the Brazos Valley Volunteer Fire Station Wednesday afternoon. Davis volunteers for the fire station any time he is not in class. The biggest fire he put out was a 200-acre fire near Huntsville.

## Call of Duty

### Aggies feel obligation to serve the public

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Chasing cars, wrestling "bad guys," driving around in a big, red fire truck - it all seems like a part of a little boy's play land. But to some Aggies, it's their job.

Mike Vincent graduated from Texas A&M in 2004 and was a proud member of the Corps of Cadets. Upon graduation, Vincent was faced with the decision of waiting for a possible military commission or finding a job.

"I got a job in sales, and I realized that I still wanted to do something where I could serve and help people - something more meaningful where I could go home and know that even if I didn't save the world, I still did something that meant something to someone," he said.

Vincent works as a police officer in Addison, a suburb north of Dallas.

"In middle school and high school, I thought that I would join the military, and the Corps kind of bred you for some sort of uniform service," Vincent said. "I think that's where I decided, at A&M, that I wanted to do something more than just sales or marketing."

Despite the danger and the challenges associated with the job, Vincent said fear isn't in his mind.

"You know that the danger is there, but you don't think about it, because if you did, you would drive yourself insane," Vincent said. "Dealing with dangerous situations and dangerous people changes the person you are - you end up becoming more skeptical of people in general. You don't live with a constant worry, but you think about how you're going to respond. If someone's hurt, how am I going to help them? If someone's shooting at us, how am I going to stop them? In your mind you're going to win, so you don't live with that constant fear."

With his current lifestyle, Vincent said he does not see himself ever leaving law enforcement. One day, he hopes to take his career to the federal level and possibly join the CIA or Secret Service.

"I just don't think I could ever go back to working a regular job," he said. "One of the things that makes being a police officer so addictive is that you really are your own boss. You're alone in your car, and you make your own decisions on how you spend your time. You're out and about. You have so much autonomy and you get to talk to people, get in fights. Sure, it's a little dangerous, but it's a little boy's dream job - and you get paid for it! I guess in a way, it's a way of life."

Senior forestry major Gordon Davis volunteers as a firefighter for Brazos County. His job involves dealing with incidents such as car wrecks, grass fires, house fires and also public education. He also works for the Texas Forest Service with the crew in Huntsville to fight forest fires because he plans to work for the Federal Forest Service after graduation.

"I don't actually know what made me decide to be a firefighter, but when I signed up here, I called my mom and she told me when I was a little boy I always wanted to be one," Davis said. "I'd wear the hat and ride around on a fire truck. I'm not sure what made me want to do it. I guess I've always wanted to do it, and finally got the opportunity to."

Last summer, Davis faced forest fires that spanned more than 100 acres and found a new perspective on his frequent opponent.

"Once I was in a forest fire, and it just jumped over my head and into the forest next to me. The experience doesn't make you scared, but it makes you respect fire a lot more," he said. "Some people look at fire as a living being - it needs oxygen to breathe, it consumes, it can always turn on you and do what you don't expect it to do, so you really learn to respect it. You don't know what you'll get at its full force."

There is no place for fear when Matthew Pepper fights fires. Although he plans to build a

career in business, he has been working for the Montgomery County River Plantation Fire Department since the age of 16.

"When I'm in a house fire, I'm not scared," said Pepper, a senior industrial distribution major. "I know there's danger, but I know me and my guys are trained and know what we're doing. The guy behind me has my back, and I'm watching the guy in front of me. If you start getting scared about it, then you're gonna panic and hesitate - you have to be alert, vigilant and aware of all possibilities. You have to take care of business."

In Pepper's experience with a real emergency situation, an adrenaline rush - instead of fear - takes control.

"It's an adrenaline rush to fight a real fire. From the moment you hear your pager it's an adrenaline rush," he said. "We're trained to control that rush and do what we do. When you pull into the neighborhood, you can smell the smoke and see the fire, you know it's not a false call. You're dressed, and you know what you need to do, so you do it. It's a complete rush."

Like Vincent and Davis, Pepper had been interested in his field since a young age and had the desire to help the public. He said in general, he was always interested in the emergency fields.

"I've always been the one to take care of problems, and I don't like relying on someone, so I like being the one to take care of problems in emergency situations," Pepper said. "For fire fighting, I've never been paid a dollar to do it. I have the same certification of any other firefighter, but I feel that fire fighting is the way I can give back to my community and my state."