Word spread through an e-mail. Short. Sweet. Texas A&M’s Army ROTC program is the recipient of the General MacArthur Award.

“Congrats,” Col. Michael L. Gibler ’85 paraphrased, “and get back to work.”

And like that, Texas A&M’s Army ROTC program was named as one of the best in the nation.

This form of subdued celebration works for the purposeful cadets within the Army ROTC. The hard working, hard studying, hardnosed cadets with hard-soled shoes that tap the tiled floor of the Trigon’s third story expect excellence. And if excellence is expected, excellence is exacted.

As far as Col. Gibler knows, this is the first time that Texas A&M’s Army ROTC ever earned this distinction awarded to units that best exemplify MacArthur’s guidelines of “duty, honor, country.”

As far as the five men gathered to discuss the specifics of the award with Texas Aggie, the recognition is appreciated—”It’s great to get validation,” said Master Sgt. Stoney Ramsey—but, it was never the goal.

It will never be the goal, he said. These cadets are going into combat. They signed a contract knowing that after commissioning, their next transition is most likely to the battlefield, said Maj. Keith Roberts.

Their heads shook in unison. Prizes mean nothing. It’s the Army ROTC’s goal to prepare cadets for what’s to come.

How that goal plays out, and subsequently how A&M received the award, is through training. The summer between an Army ROTC cadet’s junior and senior years, they attend what’s called the Leadership Development & Assessment Course, said Roberts. It’s conducted at Fort Lewis, Washington, to evaluate and train. For 30 days, the cadets are watched and their successes tracked, in physical fitness along with tactical and leadership skills.

A&M’s Army ROTC cadets had a stellar showing.

The award also takes into account overall second lieutenant commission numbers based on assigned missions,

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—Maj. Keith Roberts
quality of military training, performance in military training, and cadet retention rate—of which Texas A&M excels, Gibler said.

Being the best is debatable, but you can’t refute numbers.

“Cadets run almost everything,” said Roberts, who recently returned from Iraq. “They’re doing stuff here that took me months to get my men to do... They’re heads and tails above their peers.”

“This is a unique place,” said Luke Grotelueschen ’11. “We receive extreme leadership training.”

Cadets train cadets, Ramsey said, and the cadre assists. That’s who Ramsey and Roberts are, cadre. Loose definition: the military officers and representatives responsible for training cadets.

Each year, cadets learn a set of skills that they can then teach to new cadets the following year. Sophomores teach, juniors organize logistics and seniors manage large timelines and goals, Ramsey said.

“We throw them into the fire,” he said. In doing so, cadets learn what works. They discover how to motivate their subordinates. “The military is the premier leadership program in the world,” said Cody Waidelich ’11, and Texas A&M is graduating some of the best officers in the country.

“This is a tough program to finish,” Ramsey said.

Cadets Grotelueschen and Waidelich wear uniforms festooned with pins and patches of training and honors hard won. Airborne school, air assault school, Rudders Rangers—“They wear a lot of their awards on their sleeves, but what you don’t see is the time they put in the community,” Roberts said.

“I am always impressed and gladened to be serving with these guys,” he said.

Duty, honor, and country—“We’re on a pretty good path,” Gibler said.