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[Keith Hamm](#)

Graduating ROTC cadet draws inspiration from family, personal grit

Graduating history major Alec Garcia says he was about 100 pounds overweight when he was a senior in high school. Then he saw a military basic training video of aspiring soldiers, about his own age at the time, pushing their physical limits in gruelling displays of endurance and mental toughness.

“Watching the video, it made me mad that my weight was holding me back from doing something like that,” remembered Garcia, a California native who grew up in Hollister. “But at the same time it also created a challenge for me to take on.”

Spurred into action, Garcia said he shed 60 pounds in six months. And these days, he’s down 100 pounds since high school, staying in shape year round in large part due to the physical demands of UC Santa Barbara’s Army Reserve Officer Training Corps [\(ROTC\) program](#).

“Honestly, it’s been a wild ride,” he said, reflecting on ROTC highlights, such as repelling out of helicopters during air assault training, participating in the marathon-length [Bataan Memorial Death March](#) four times and his three years on the Ranger Challenge team. This year, with Garcia as co-captain, UCSB’s Surfrider Battalion team advanced for the first time to the Ranger Challenge [championship event](#) at West Point.

Word around ROTC campus headquarters is that Garcia has been a standout cadet since day one. He's driven, goal-oriented and dependable, and a good listener who's happy to help a fellow cadet work through difficulties in school, work or personal matters — and that he does so selflessly, a trait aligned with Army values.

It could also be said that a career in military service is in Garcia's blood. Both of his grandfathers were U.S. Army soldiers in Vietnam. His older cousin, now an Air Force first lieutenant, was an ROTC cadet, as well. One of Garcia's uncles was in the Marine Corps. Another uncle, Gary Hosman, a former staff sergeant with the Air Force, will be on hand at the commissioning ceremony on June 13 to give Garcia the traditional "first salute" as a newly commissioned officer.

Next month, Garcia will begin a yearlong infantry program in basic officer leadership at Fort Benning's ranger and airborne schools in Georgia. Then it's off to his first unit, at Fort Campbell, located on the Kentucky-Tennessee border, to work with the 101st Airborne Division.

Until then, he said, "I'm going back home to hang out with my family as much as possible."

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