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## Tafuna High School Army JROTC Robotics Team Dominates 8th Brigade Competition, Earns Spot at National Championship



In a thrilling display of skill, resilience, and teamwork, the Tafuna High School Army JROTC Robotics Team, *Toa Robotics*, claimed victory at the 8th Brigade Robotics Competition JROTC Invitational on February 01st. Held at the Liberty Station Conference Center in San Diego, California, the competition brought together 28 teams from across the 8th Brigade area of responsibility, including Hawaii, Saipan, Guam, Nevada, and California. Toa Robotics not only secured the title of Tournament Champions but also took home the Excellence Award and the Skills Champion Award, earning them a fully funded trip to the JROTC VEX Robotics National Championship in Dallas, Texas.

The competition, centered around the VEX Robotics season's game *High Stakes*, challenged teams to design, build, and program robots capable of collecting rings and placing them on green stakes in designated positive corners of the field. Each match consisted of a 15-second autonomous period, where robots operated without driver input, followed by a 1-minute and 45-second driver-controlled segment.

Toa Robotics, led by Team Captain and Primary Programmer Filiga Tufa, showcased exceptional programming skills during the autonomous portion, winning all six of their matches and earning valuable bonus points. Their robot, aptly named *Gimme SaMoa Robotics*, became a crowd favorite for its precision and efficiency. However, the road to victory wasn't without challenges. During their third match, the team was disqualified for a rule violation when a stake was placed in a positive corner after the 30-second warning. This setback dropped them from 2nd to 6th place, but the team refused to be discouraged. "We knew we had to fight back," said Co-Captain Francis Ah-Vui, the team's primary designer, engineer, and driver. "Our team's resilience and determination are what set us apart." By the end of the qualification rounds, Toa Robotics had clawed their way back to 2nd place ranking, setting the stage for an impressive performance in the elimination rounds. During the Alliance selection phase, they were chosen by *Enigma Team* from St. Louis High School in Hawaii, the 1st place ranked team in qualifications. Together, the Hawaii and American Samoa alliance dominated the competition, securing decisive victories in the Quarter Finals (44-2), Semi-Finals (38-8), and Finals (33-2).

At the awards ceremony, Toa Robotics was honored with three prestigious awards:

- **Tournament Champions Award** – Recognizing their victory in the competition.
- **Excellence Award** – Celebrating overall excellence in both judged and performance categories.
- **Skills Champion Award** – Earned earlier in the season during a Live Remote Skills Event in November 2023.

CSM Keneti Pauulu, the 8th Brigade Command Sergeant Major, presented the awards and commended the team for their hard work and dedication. As a result of their victory, Toa Robotics has earned a fully funded trip to the JROTC VEX Robotics National Championship at the VEX Worlds Championship in Dallas, Texas, with all airfare, hotel, and meals covered by the 8th Brigade.

The success of Toa Robotics is a testament to the hard work and collaboration of its members:

- **Cadet Cpt. Filiga Tufa** – Team Captain and Primary Programmer
- **Task Force Command Cadet Sgt. Major Francis Ah-Vui** – Co-Captain, Primary Designer, Engineer, and Driver
- **Cadet Sgt. Olaitalosaga Sauvao** – Assistant Designer, Engineer, and Driver
- **Cadet Cpl. Penaia Tinitali** – Assistant Programmer, Builder in

Training, and Backup Driver

- **Cadet Sgt. Josephine Stanley** – Engineer Notebook Journalist, Logistics Officer, and Equipment Manager

These cadets spent countless hours during the summer, after school, and on weekends designing, building, engineering, and programming their robot. Their dedication paid off in a big way, and their achievements have brought pride to Tafuna High School and the entire community of American Samoa.

The Tafuna High School JROTC program continues to excel in STEM-related competitions. The *Toa Drones* team is set to compete in the 8th Brigade Aerial Drone Competition in Reno, Nevada, from February 21-22, 2025. Fundraising efforts are ongoing to support the team's travel and competition expenses.

The team extends its heartfelt gratitude to the local businesses and community members who have generously supported their efforts thus far, including:

- **Paramount Builders** – Papalii Lauili Alofa
- **Pago Pago Trading Company** – Ella and Stanley Gurr
- **PIOA Consulting & Engineering LLC** – Will & Sisi Spitzenberg
- **All Star Signs** – Tuai Mua
- **Island Business Center** – Kennedy Nofogatotoa

The Tafuna HS JROTC Instructors MAJ Siimoa Galoia, MSG Acania Puletasi and SFC Lei Solaita extend their heartfelt gratitude to the parents of Team 21111A, Julius & Virginia Tufa; Joseph and Juliette Tufa of Nu'uuli and Ilili; Emanuele & Matile Ah Vui of Saoluafata and Ululoloa currently living in Mapusaga Fou; Thor & Lydian Tinali of Vaitogi; Faitasi & Lina Sauvao of Faleula & Faleasiu currently living in Pavaia'i; Yvonne Satila of Fagaima; whose unwavering support has been instrumental in the team's success. Without the parents' support, there is no program, and we are deeply indebted to them for all they do and the sacrifices they make for their cadets. A huge thank you to Patricia Su'esu'e for safely chaperoning Team 21111A from American Samoa to San Diego and back.

The achievements of Tafuna HS JROTC Toa Robotics would not be possible without the unwavering support of Executive Advisor For Education Lorena Seu, DOE Director Maefau Dr. Mary Taufetee, Deputy Director Dr. Roxanne Salavea, Deputy Director Dr. Teresa Atuatasi, AD Dr. Dottie Tuimasatatele, Tafuna HS Principal Tutuila Togilau and Director of Army Instruction COL (Ret.) John Tulifua. A special acknowledgement and thank you to the now retired and former DOE Director Talauega Dr. Samasoni Asalei whose support of this program in the past two years has helped build the foundation to Toa Robotics success.

The Tafuna High School Army JROTC Robotics Program is more than just a competition team—it's a platform for students to develop skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) while learning the values of leadership, discipline, and teamwork. With their sights set on the national championship in Dallas from May 9-11, Toa Robotics is ready to take on their next challenge and continue making their community proud.

In addition to their robotics success, the *Toa Drones* team is gearing up for the 8th Brigade Aerial Drone Competition in Reno, Nevada, from February 21-22, 2024. This two-day event will test the cadets' skills in drone piloting, programming, and mission execution. Fundraising efforts are ongoing to support the team's travel and competition expenses, and the program remains grateful for the continued support of the community.

The Tafuna High School JROTC program is a shining example of how dedication, innovation, and teamwork can lead to extraordinary achievements. Whether on the robotics field or in the skies with drones, these cadets are proving that the future is bright for the Warrior Nation. To donate to these teams please contact the THS JROTC Team at [siimoa.galoia@doe.as](mailto:siimoa.galoia@doe.as); [acania.puletasi@doe.as](mailto:acania.puletasi@doe.as) or [lei.solaita@doe.as](mailto:lei.solaita@doe.as).

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