

Mighty Hawkeye News

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• ARMY ROTC •

A Mother's Story

Dean Anne Zalenski

In 2008, our 15-year-old sophomore son and I were sitting down to eat at a Texas Roadhouse, halfway through the meal he looked at me and told me that he wanted to join the military after high school. To be candid, I was stunned. He had never once evinced interest in the military, no family members were active in the military, and he seemed far more intent on just having as much fun with his friends as possible. I was an experienced enough parent to not let my cards show, so I said "hm...that's interesting." But inside I was instantly feeling anxiety build. Obviously, I was trading in parental anxiety and stereotypes, but nevertheless, I felt sad. I told him there was lots of time to decide, he was free to make his own choices, and we would continue the conversation later.

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I imagined—maybe hoped—this would blow over, and that Evan would follow his peers and move on to a traditional college path. That didn't happen; in fact, he suggested he might go to Basic Training right out of high school, and bypass college for the immediate future. That time, I let my cards show—loud and clear. Evan's dad and I were adamant that he go to college and officer training, rather than enlisting. He pushed back, saying once he was 18, he could do what he wanted but the truth is, he wouldn't turn 18 until after graduation and he would need me to support his application. That wasn't going to happen.

I still was mystified by his interest in the military. On the one hand, he was always happy-go-lucky, life was for having fun, and there was a certain disorderliness about the way he approached school, to say nothing of his room. He was not known for his self-discipline. On the other hand, He was 9 when the 9 11 attacks occurred, and I remember he asked questions constantly about we could do to help. That event has a profound impact on him. I thought about his personal characteristics, and his interest in the military started to make more sense. His personal standards are high, and he likes being part of a larger group with a well-defined mission. And our family values included a deep commitment to service to our society, and we always told our children that those to whom much is given, much is expected.

So eventually off he went to the University of Iowa and entered ROTC. While I cannot honestly say my fears vanished, what happened his first year was truly transformative. Within months, Evan studied harder than he ever had in his life, involved himself in all the requirements of the ROTC program, and engaged in optional activities as well. He became, it seemed nearly overnight, a disciplined and focused young man. His first bout with final exam week was a breeze, because the required study periods that were built around PT and classes taught him to stay ahead and maintain engagement in classes. Evan was on the Dean's list 7 of his 8 semesters in Iowa and availed himself of numerous opportunities. He traveled to various part of the country, to Thailand one summer and received exciting training during other summers.



PHOTO BY LTC KUEBLER

When Evan graduated, naturally I was immensely proud of him, but I want to give credit to this fine program. Not being in ROTC was the path not taken, so I have no idea what he would be like today had he just done the traditional college path. I believe that the structure of the program, the excellent and consistent leadership, and the academic and emotional support students in ROTC receive, I find it surprising that more students are not drawn to this program. Not only is there financial support for a variety of activities, but there is also a consistent internalized structure that sets expectations while supporting student learning to meet those expectations. ROTC posed to Evan serious challenges (physical, emotional, and intellectual) that drew out his deep strengths. Learning to think strategically, which is a prerogative for leadership is something isn't taught through books alone but emerges from the constellation of the multiple aspects of ROTC training.

Evan left college, continued training at Fort Benning, successfully completed Ranger training, and was eventually transferred to Fort Drum. From Fort Drum he was accepted into a program that the military supported for students to complete law school. After his graduation from law school Evan was transferred to Fort Lewis, where he lives today.

I have cannot speak highly enough about the ROTC program at the University of Iowa. From being a worried and uninformed parent, I have become an advocate and admirer of what this program does for young people. Be proud of your child if he or she makes the decision to gain an education, serve the country, and know that he or she is in good hands in this superb and well-led program.



PHOTO BY CPT MOUSSA KONE

Meet the Cadre

CPT Moussa Kone

Go Hawks! Is my way of greeting the University of Iowa Cadets of the Mighty Hawkeye Battalion (MHBN), America's fineness Cadets. My name is Captain Moussa T. Kone, and I received my commission through Fordham University Army ROTC back in 2015. It is an honor to be part of the MHBN Army ROTC program. A program that emphasizes the importance of honesty, responsibility, accountability, teamwork, innovation, diversity, humility, continuous learning, and other values that are essential for building strong and ethical leaders of our free world.

A Hawkeye First

CDT Keagen Head

I was first attracted to the MHBN after a positive first impression that gave me the sense how successful and trustworthy this program is. After spending a year and a half in the program, I can say without a doubt that those imperative qualities have come to fruition. I'll be forever grateful that I followed my heart to the University of Iowa to pursue the academics and this program, for it's done a great job of preparing me for my future endeavors. At the end of the day, I want to have served a meaningful career and to have a positive impact on Soldiers' lives, and I don't think there's a better program to prepare me to do so,

Naming a particular instance that has impacted me personally during the time I've spent in this program wouldn't do justice to the overall impact it's had on me. The true impact has been a result of a collection of valuable experiences and relationships I've built and been a part of. There isn't a day that goes by without an opportunity to learn from my comrades and cadre in this program, and the people I've met along the way will serve as life-long valuable connections that mean the world to me. None of this would be possible without the MHBN, so it's with great pride that I say: GO HAWKS!

Contact us!

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