

October 28, 2006

My duty,
My calling

The most common question I get once people know I am in Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps is, "Why do you want to be in the Army?" I always have trouble making them understand. My hope is that this column can help.

I think it is more than a sense of duty- it is a calling. It is more than battalions, companies, platoons, and squads; it is the brotherhood of men and women who are united by the same cause. It is not an obligation; it is an honor. It is not a quest for personal glory. It is an answer to the call of service for our country.

I realize the military is not for everyone. I do not want you to think I believe that everyone must serve in the military, because I don't. In fact, I believe the strength of America's armed forces lies in the fact that it is an all-volunteer force. Soldiers are much more effective if they want to be a soldier and believe in what they are doing.

For me personally, I cannot be content to sit on the sidelines. For me to feel like I am contributing, I must be one of the players out on the field. So when I see the sacrifices other Americans have made for me, I suppose I feel a little guilty that I have not contributed any of my skills and my talents to the relentless struggle to protect America's freedom and security. I know that if I do not serve my country now, when our country needs me most, then I will never be able to live with myself later.

On October 21, 2006, I saw *Flags of our Fathers* with a friend of mine who does Army ROTC with me here at Maryland. To most, it was a mere reenactment of a war a long, long time ago. To me, it was a war that I was fighting, a war that I will be fighting, in a few short years. It was me fighting the same fight, me suffering the same casualties, me enduring the same pain. It was me watching my best friend die in my arms; it was me praying to God to let me live another day.

Five days after I watched *Flags of our Fathers*, I found myself mourning the loss of a friend from high school who had enlisted in the Marine Corps. According to *The Washington Post*, Lance Corporal Eric W. Herzberg, a 2005 graduate of Severna Park High School, was killed by hostile fire "while conducting combat operations in Iraq's Anbar province". The date of his death? October 21, 2006.

After Eric died, a friend of mine asked me if I still wanted to go into the Army. The answer was an unequivocal "yes." In fact, his death reinforced my decision. Yes, it is a possibility that I could die in combat. I know that. I understand that. But in the words of Teddy Roosevelt, "You have got to have courage. I don't care how good a man is, if he is timid, his value is limited."

I always imagine myself in 50 years as a grandfather talking to his young grandson. My grandson asks me, "Grandpa, what did you do to protect America when the

terrorists attacked on September 11th?” I feel that if I do not serve my country now, the only thing that will fill my heart when my grandson asks me that question will be a sinking feeling of regret and shame. I cannot live my life filled with regret and shame.

As a member of the Army ROTC program, I know I will not live my life with regret and shame. When I put on the uniform of the United States Army, I cannot help but feel a sense of pride and honor. Just as Eric knew that he was meant to be a Marine, I know that I am meant to be an Army soldier.

Not everyone is called to be a soldier. But if you feel that you are called to be a soldier, if you feel that you are called to be a Marine, if you feel that you are called to do something, whatever it may be, do not be afraid to go for it. What makes Eric Herzberg a hero is not the fact that he knew what his calling was. What makes him a hero is the fact that he had the courage to act upon his calling.

-Ned Curry