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ENG 562

Maxwell

At First Glance

If you were to walk the campus of The Citadel on an average day, you would see hundreds of uniformed cadets. All of these students have chosen to pursue a more disciplined and unique higher education than the average college student. They are always seen practicing drills, running or attending classes; some are students whose focus is school. Others see the opportunity to do more. Miller Perrill is one such Citadel student.

At first glance, Miller looks like any other Citadel student. It was only when I sat down and heard his story that I realized he was different.

Miller is a member of the Army National Guard. He grew up in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and has a family history in the military—ancestors who fought in the Marion's Brigade in the American Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and in other conflicts up through the modern era. Miller himself was inspired to join after hearing a class speaker. During his first year at The Citadel, a member of the National Guard came to speak about his experience with the National Guard. Miller was inspired by the speaker's stories of his time and experiences in the National Guard, and he decided to sign up himself. By the end of his third year at The Citadel, Miller was being sent to Kosovo, in Eastern Europe, for nine months.

When Miller spoke of his experience in Kosovo, his explanation for why he was there was a simple one. He said that Kosovo was not like being in Afghanistan, or other locations

throughout the Middle East. Instead of fighting a war, he was sent on a peacekeeping mission, assigned to “keep a balance” and “maintain the middle ground” between the Serbians and the Albanians who, he explained, “aren’t big fans of each other.” Miller’s description of his assigned mission simplifies the range of duties he and his fellow servicemen had: Miller’s Company was tasked with not only helping keep the peace, but also guarding borders and curbing smuggling in this unstable area.

Miller and his company worked to decrease the possibility of violent actions between the Serbians and Albanians, groups that were even more volatile then than now. The Albanians and the Serbians are the two largest ethnic groups living in Kosovo. Albanians are traditionally followers of Islam, while the Serbians are Orthodox Christian, and their differences and history of conflict often keep them from a peaceful existence.

He explained that while he was there, “no day was the same.” Miller and his company moved continuously around the country working as a “security element,” simultaneously protecting and patrolling.

He now thinks of the experience as a worthwhile one. Looking back, he was happy he was able to go, though at the time “resentful of the circumstances” in which he was sent—with almost no notice. He signed up to leave, and was put on a sort of waiting list for a mission in Kosovo. Because he wasn’t notified that he’d been selected following signing up, Miller moved on with his life in Charleston with his now wife and two dogs and traveled around the state working for the National Guard. Just as he and his wife were about to move into a new apartment, Miller was given short notice that he was being sent to Kosovo.

Miller explained, “When you join the military, you know what you sign up for”—he was glad to go and have the experience. Halfway through his tour, he was transferred and worked as

an operator, a position in which he learned valuable skills and gained “a lot from the experience.” While abroad, Miller became friends with those in his company and other soldiers from “eight or nine different nationalities, learning different cultures and languages and making friends from all over the world.” Many of these friends he said he still keeps in touch with today.

He was able to return to South Carolina to see the births of both his son and daughter, and he has been home since early June of 2013. Miller is a full-time dad to his two young children and a full-time student, working to finish his degree in English at The Citadel.

Many college students have traveled and encountered other cultures. Many fathers are able to set aside time for their families. Many servicemen shoulder immense responsibilities and are put in danger to ensure the safety of others. Few however, are able to do all of this at once; Miller Perrill can.