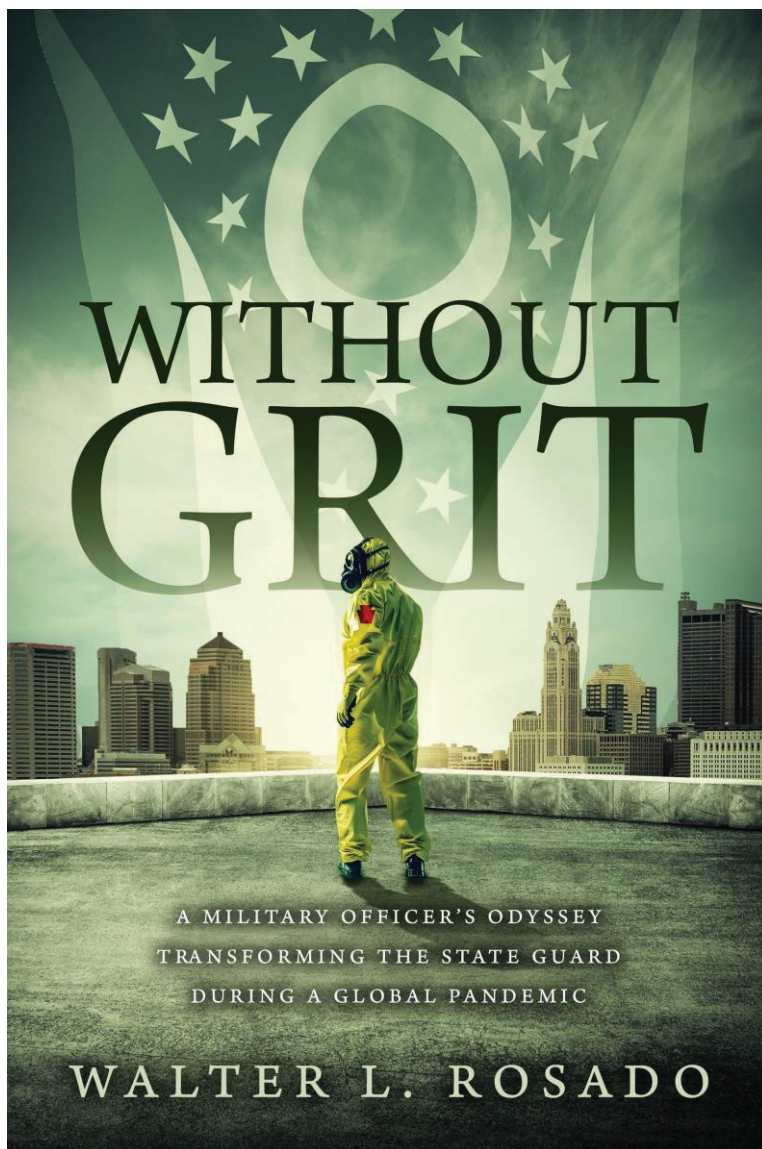


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is about the Ohio Military Reserve and its response to the COVID-19 Pandemic under the Ohio National Guard's Operation Steady Resolve. I would like to thank all the men and women of the Ohio Military Reserve and National Guard teams that deployed on State Active Duty or worked behind the scenes to support the initiative. You saved lives, made a difference in the lives of many, and made this book possible. I am proud to know you.

I thank the United States Army and National Guard for preparing me as a soldier, especially the soldiers of the 2ND IBCT and 56TH SBCT of the 28TH Infantry Division. I entered the Ohio Military Reserve with a strong foundation and combat experience thanks to the example you set for me and the standards you held me to. You transformed me into a competent leader that troops could count on. I would not have been successful in the Ohio Military Reserve without your guidance and continued friendship.

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This book was made possible through the generosity and financial support of fifty people who donated \$3,420 via the Kickstarter.com crowdfunding platform. This capital was used to pay for editing, copyright registration, interior design, cover design, promotional materials, and initial inventory. A comprehensive list of donors is in the appendix at the rear of the book. These people believed in this story enough to put their hard-earned dollars behind it. They also shared and spread the word via social media. Without them, this book would have never seen the light of day. They are the ONLY reason I could move forward and bring this book to market. On top of financial support, they also offered encouragement and motivation. This story deserves to be told. The Kickstarter donors facilitated the telling and expanded the story's reach significantly. They are deserving of and have my total thanks and appreciation.

My employer supported the military at every level and did what it could to empower its Veteran and Reserve Component Employees. I was blessed to work for a Healthcare company, Highmark Inc., which—like the military—battled the Coronavirus on every front. Highmark supported me when I deployed or needed time to focus on Operation Steady Resolve. Through Highmark, I could network with other military authors like former U.S. Navy SEAL Sniper Kevin Lacz and former Blue Angels Lead Solo Pilot John Foley. Kevin and John became my mentors and cheerleaders as I continued my writing. Highmark also introduced me to members of the Greatest Generation, like World War II D-Day Veteran Howard W. Pfeifer, who helped to inspire me and keep my problems in perspective. Having a Company and a Management Team that cares about you and encourages you to do what you can to make the world a better place gave me a tremendous edge. I remain grateful to all my co-workers for their kindness and patience with me before, during, and after the Pandemic.

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My wife, Jodi, deserves all the credit in the world. Our dating life and marriage all occurred before the Pandemic. When a man joins the military, his wife and family also join. They get drafted. The role, the contributions, and the hardship which military spouses endure cannot be understated. Military Spouses are part of the Army Team. Jodi came from a strong Ohio farming family. Ohio was her State, not mine. When I initially joined the Ohio Military Reserve, I did so with my wife's blessing and support and the shared understanding that the State Guard never deploys or gets called up to duty. We saw it as a way for me to softly transition out of military life that would let me walk away slowly in steps rather than cold-turkey—like ripping off a Band-Aid. Neither she nor I knew that the Ohio Military Reserve would soon enter a prolonged period of State Active Duty in response to a global pandemic. Being deployed to support the Pandemic meant time spent away from my new wife and family. Should anyone wish to thank me for my efforts, your gratitude would more appropriately be directed toward Jodi. We had two beautiful children born during the Pandemic, Theodore and Maximilian, and to them, too, I regret not being home more, not spending more time with them, and not being in the present during their first years. They are growing so fast, and I know I can never get that time back. My wife's faith and work ethic carried us through. We prayed together each day of our marriage, even on the phone when I couldn't be home. Thank you, Jodi, Theodore, Maximilian, and our future yet-to-be-born children, for allowing me the opportunity to help others become soldiers when I should have been at home helping you. It was a sacrifice for all of us, but I hope its impact can be realized someday, and I hope this book offers you some insight into what I was doing.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank God. God deserves ALL the Glory and ALL the credit for any success I've ever had. I strive to be a better man to live out God's intended purpose for me,

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whatever that might entail. My greatest ambition is growing in my relationship with Jesus Christ and getting myself and my family closer to Sainthood and Heaven. I am a sinner and very flawed. I do not deserve a seat at God's table, but I come anyway because Jesus invited me. He extended the same invitation to you. All you need to do to accept is say 'yes.' God gave me this platform so that I can reach you. I can do all things through him who gives me strength (and so can you) (cf Phil 4:13).



INTRODUCTION

In 1997, at just thirteen years of age, I made Dorseyville Middle School history when, after being frustrated by a morning math class, I left the building and continued an additional three miles, which included walking along a busy highway, PA Route 910, to where a pop-up military recruiting center stood. When I walked in, the door slammed behind me with a bell belt sounding off as it rattled against the glass; I'm sure the recruiter didn't know what he was looking at. I was an overweight, pimple-ridden kid with thick-rimmed glasses, unfashionable sweatpants, and a bad attitude. I had low self-esteem and not many friends. "Can I help you?" the recruiter asked. I plopped down on a chair and told him that school wasn't for me. I was meant for more. I wanted to be a soldier. To his credit, he didn't laugh. He kept a straight face, asked me how old I was, then, when I answered, said, "We'd love to have you, but you are just too young. You've got

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the rest of junior high and high school to look forward to, but after that, come talk to us.” He drove me home. I was in big trouble.

A few weeks later, I got a letter from a U.S. Navy Captain (O-6), E. Meyer. The letter told me about a youth program, the Sea Cadets, and encouraged me, “The more educated you are..., the further you can go.” A couple of weeks later, I was a Sea Cadet. My time as a sea cadet didn’t last long. They met at a Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Center in North Versailles, PA, and it was tough for my family to get me there. It was a bit of a hike. We couldn’t afford the membership dues or the uniform, and though I loved it, I couldn’t continue. Still, the sea cadets showed me precisely what I needed to do to one day ship off to boot camp for the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or Marines. I walked away with some friendships, including Lukas Toth. On my first day, there was a quiz on naval ranks. I knew them all, not because I was incredibly studious, but because my grandmother liked to binge-watch a television show called ‘JAG,’ and I often joined her because of the military theme. I did so well with Navy and Marine ranks and ratings that Lucas, also 13 years old, told me, “You’re going to be a Captain someday.” Caught off guard and not knowing how to react, I told him, “I think you will be a Captain long before me.” Ironically, Lucas and I would eventually be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on the same day, he in the Army and I in the Ohio Military Reserve. Still, there was no way that either of us could know that back then. The bug was officially planted. All I wanted was to be a soldier. Rather than continue as a sea cadet, I joined the wrestling team and started folkstyle wrestling while trying to become a better student.

I was in high school when the September 11, 2001 Attacks occurred. I was a junior member in the Aspinwall Volunteer Fire Department at that time. I remember vividly the hour-and-a-half drive to Shanksville to look for and through the wreckage of Flight 93. The day burned into my memory and made me want to serve more. I graduated high

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school and went to college. No one in my family had attended college, and I promised my mom and grandmother that I'd be the first. I attended Thiel College, a tiny Lutheran Liberal Arts College on the Pennsylvania/Ohio Border. I spent four years there as a collegiate wrestler. I graduated in 2007 with a degree in history.

I had several job offers to teach social studies, and I could go anywhere or do anything I wanted to do. I had limitless potential. With that, I joined the Army during wartime. I attended basic training, advanced individual training, specialized marksmanship training, and the Army's Bradley and Stryker Fighting Vehicle Courses before deploying to Iraq with the 1-112TH Infantry Regiment. The details of this deployment were outlined in my first book, *Without Fear; A Soldier's Memoir of Sacrifice, Love, Tragedy and Triumph in Central Iraq*. Writing that book and telling my deployment story was a life-changing experience for me. I went on to write another two books over the next two years. I enjoy writing immensely and am a proud independent author.

My military career stalled out as my civilian career flourished. I completed my Master's degree at Duquesne University and my Ph.D. from Robert Morris University while working at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh and gaining civilian experience as a Project Manager. After four years at CMU, I went to work in private enterprise for Highmark, Inc., where I worked as a Business Management Consultant specializing in change management during enterprise software implementations. I tripled my university salary within just a few years and qualified for membership in MENSA, the High IQ Society—my time as a National Guardsman was winding down.

I began dating my then-girlfriend (now wife), Jodi. We dealt with challenges together, and I continued to wrestle with my feelings about leaving the military. I'll get into my thought process and what

happened in my body, heart, and soul later in this book. My point is that my whole world was changing rapidly. In 2018 when shots rang out, I rushed to the aid of Pittsburgh Police during the Tree of Life Synagogue mass shooting. Afterward, the police and the Mayor- Bill Peduto, recognized me with a plaque. All I did was react while others sat on the sidelines. Anyone could have contributed what little I did, but they didn't. The stress I experienced while responding to the shooting signaled that it was time for me to settle down. Maybe my Army experience helped.

Then God put two things on the path in front of me; The Ohio Military Reserve and SARS COV-2 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). I didn't pray for or plan for either of these things, but there they were. COVID-19 was a viral socio-economic threat that exploited racial and political divisions, turning Americans against each other while killing our most vulnerable. Hard times were thrust upon all of us. As I observed what was occurring in our country, I wondered if everything in my life somehow led me to this moment. By that point, I was a decorated Army Combat Veteran, had more than twenty years of experience in the fire service, was highly educated, and had recently been hailed as a local hero for my actions in a mass shooting. People respected me, and when I spoke, they listened. I was what I wanted to become when I left middle school in 1997, a decorated and respected soldier.

When I deployed to Iraq in 2009, I instinctively knew it was worth writing about, so I did. Many of my fellow soldiers said they would also write a book. Few did. I'll give a shout-out to two of my fellow Bloody Bucket soldiers that did, Major General John L. Gronski, who wrote *Iron-Sharpened Leadership*, and Thomas A. Middleton, a combat medic who wrote *Saber's Edge*. They share insights into Iraq and the Global War on Terrorism differently than mine. They are good books and worth checking out.

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I joined the State Guard in 2020 and soon after that, heard words that I never thought I'd hear in my lifetime... "Global Pandemic." We would deploy to combat this invisible enemy, a virus, and to better the lives of those impacted by it. Just as in 2009, I instinctively knew this was worth writing about. This was a story that needed to be recorded and remembered. *Without Grit* was born. What you now hold in your hands is the culmination of nearly three years' worth of civil support and sustainment missions conducted in Ohio. It was a great honor for me to work alongside the men and women of the Ohio Military Reserve during these trying times. It is both an honor and a responsibility that I now undertake in trying to tell the story.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

DON'T TAP OUT! THE DAY I QUIT

When a wrestler retires, he removes his shoes, leaves them alongside the mats, gives the crowd a wave, and walks away, usually to applause. It's a beautiful sight and represents the torch handed off to the next capable generation of grapplers. Those wrestlers fought until the end. They didn't quit. They were the personification of Grit. I still have my pair of Adidas Combat Speeds. I never retired them. The first days of my senior collegiate wrestling season were rough on me. I'd accepted that my goal of becoming an NCAA All-American, top eight in your weight in the country- would never happen.

I didn't have the talent to get me there. The last three years had been fantastic, a blur. Our Thiel College Wrestling Squad had won the President's Athletic Conference each of the previous three years, and we were heavily favored to repeat that year. We battled up the

NCAA Division III team rankings each year that I was there and were a top-twenty team with room to grow. That year's recruiting class was stellar. We had three freshmen who were high school state champions in their perspective states. The wrestling room was so crowded that we had to break practices into two sessions, one for the lighter and one for the heavyweights. It was a great problem for any wrestling program to have. I was hyper-focused on my academics. I was nervous that I might not have enough credits to graduate and couldn't afford another semester. I was taking a full course load. One of the guys in my weight class had earned Scholar All-American Honors the year before and was a shoo-in to stand on the NCAA Podium that year. I knew I would only get to represent the team at a few bouts. I was overweight, depressed, and felt I had nothing to contribute to this group. I loved wrestling, but it didn't feel like wrestling loved me back. I gave up, and I decided it was time for me to go. I texted the head coach and asked if I could make an appointment to talk to him. He was quick to respond and set up time.

Head Coach Craig Thurber was an outstanding mentor during my college years. Years later, when debating friends about the coaching styles of greats like Sanderson at Penn State versus Brands at Iowa, I would typically reference Coach Thurber. Thurber was a PIAA Pennsylvania State Champion for Greenville High School. Thiel College was in Greenville, so Thiel was home for him. After a successful high school career, he wrestled for the University of Pittsburgh at Johnston under the tutelage of legendary UPJ Coach Pat Pecora. Thurber was an NCAA Division II Finalist for UPJ, with many wins against NCAA Division 1 All-Americans. He was a wrecking machine, merciless. After he graduated from college, he coached at Division 1 Slippery Rock University while working on a graduate degree before they ultimately dropped their program. His first year as a head coach was also my first year wrestling as a freshman at Thiel. I was casually

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recruited out of high school by Thurber, and the assistant Coach Jeff Linn, who also remains a great friend.

It didn't take much to get me to go to Thiel. A campus visit sealed the deal. That and no one else wanted me. I'd failed to secure a nomination to any of the federal service academies due to poor grades in high school. My only other college acceptance letters came from Edinboro, Clarion, and Slippery Rock, and at the time, Thiel was widely considered more prestigious. Thurber was a big guy, and I was a heavyweight, so he pushed me toward reaching my full potential. Only so many college coaches are willing to get down on the mats with their athletes- Thurber not only got on the mats with us but also wiped the floor with us. Off the mats, Coach had a laid-back demeanor; he wore glasses and seldom wore dress clothes. When the suit came out, it was an important event for our team. By the time senior year came around, Coach knew me well. I always attended every practice session and ran the study tables for our first-year students and wrestlers struggling academically. Coach knew my family situation, my flaws, and my strengths. I was not a quitter. I always fought through to the end, even when the result wasn't the outcome I'd hoped for, which was often.

But there I was, standing in front of my coach, a man for whom I had tremendous respect, to quit. I told him my sob story and told him how I felt. I ensured he knew that my presence there hurt the team and our prospects for winning. I didn't belong there. I never belonged there amongst those college athletes. I stood before the coach, not a man, but a boy without Grit. In those moments, as the words left my lips, I felt ashamed, feeling the weight of the truth of my own words. My entire friend circle was wrestlers, and I knew walking away would change things. I had no heart.

Coach Thurber looked at me for a moment, choosing the right words to say;

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I know you don't think you matter to this team. You're mistaken. Some of these younger guys... they think about quitting, but then they see you, and you're right. You aren't going to be a starter for us, and they see that, and they know it too, and say, 'I hate this too,' but if HE'S here, maybe I can be here too. If HE'S toughing it out without reward, perhaps we can hang tough a bit longer too. And if you quit, others will follow you, and the team will be weaker, but you are a man now. This isn't high school. I'm not mommy or daddy. If you want to walk away, that's your choice, and if you make it- that's okay. I'll still respect you. Practice is at 3:30. I hope to see you in the practice room. If I don't, that's okay too.

With that, I left the coach's office. I'd thought I'd feel like an enormous weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I did not. Instead, I felt like an absolute coward. I was ashamed. I showed up for practice that evening, then every practice that followed that season. I never mentioned quitting again, and Coach never brought it up. The Thiel College Tomcats went on to win their 4TH consecutive conference championship and were ranked 12TH in the Nation. The team had two All-Americans that year, Corey Murphey and Kyle Brown, wonderful people. I had the chance to represent the team as Captain at three bouts during the season, a largely ceremonial role that ends within the first minutes of any team dual. I got to wear the singlet and wrestle in varsity matches at two tournaments. It was a good year. When I graduated, I didn't leave my shoes on the mat. I was afraid to let go and quit. To my credit, I did go on to wrestle post-college with limited success. I went on to join the United States Army.

I served overseas under the 3RD Brigade, 82ND Airborne Division. Men from my infantry company were awarded their combat patch,

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emblazoned “AA.” I visited my college in uniform to check in, show off, and recruit. Coach Thurber noticed my patch. He pointed to it and said, “Good for you, it took longer than you thought, but you’re finally an All-American.” He was right; I was. I had Grit all along. I was never a wrestling all-American, but I got to carry the All-America title nonetheless on our country’s greatest team.

I was ashamed of that day when I went to see a coach and quit for a long time. Today I tell of it often. I share it to highlight that I’m flawed and weak and make mistakes. I share it to highlight the importance of a good coach. A good leader doesn’t force those following into a specific choice- he trusts them to be an adult and to accept the consequences of the decision, good or bad. I was lucky to have good mentors before I entered the armed forces. I want to be that kind of person for the soldiers under me. I share this story because God answers prayers, but sometimes His timing doesn’t align perfectly with ours. His timing is always correct.

Though as I age, everything hurts a bit more than before, and though I would get wrecked if I stepped on the mats with college athletes today, I still feel like a wrestler in my heart. A wrestler doesn’t quit.



MAKE INFORMED CHOICES: DECISION POINTS

I was re-considering what my future would be and working on what my next steps might be in the military. My Army National Guard career had stalled out and was extremely frustrating. The deployment tempo of the Pennsylvania National Guard was at an all-time high. Deployments are demanding on families and employers. They are always high stress on the individual being deployed. I didn't see a path forward for me in an Army uniform. I looked at other branches. Why not? I worked with Robin Kittell, an outstanding Naval Officer Recruiting and Retention representative. Robin was very attentive to me. She encouraged me to go through the steps for a US Navy Direct Commission, then choose later if I qualify. I subjected myself once more, at Robin's bequest, to the Military

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Entrance Processing System (MEPS). The last time I'd gone through MEPS, it wasn't enjoyable. It was two days of waiting rooms, blood work, eye exams, psych evaluations, records review, the infamous naked duck walking, and physical inspection of your rectum using a flashlight. The entire process was highly intrusive. It was almost like they didn't want you to join up. They did everything they could to find barriers to service. My first MEPS experience ended with me raising my right hand and swearing into the US Army. The only problem they discovered was that I was color blind. I still was able to enter the armed forces, but it did limit what jobs I could do and what advanced schools I could attend. I would never be a paratrooper. This is fair. Try reading a color-coded map under a red light at nighttime if you are color-blind. It is damned hard.

I had no reason to think this MEPS experience would be any different. I arrived at the Pittsburgh Federal Building at about 4 am per Robin's instructions. I had to wait there for a few hours before being permitted to enter the facility. There was no one to operate the metal detectors, and they wanted people to move to the specific floor MEPS was on in groups rather than as individuals to control the stream of people. A van pulled up outside the building, and out popped a group of kids ages 17 to 19, part of a U.S. Marine Corps Delayed Entry Program. Initially, I was expected to "Fall in" with them. So, I stood in a line at parade rest with these much younger recruits. At the same time, I got barked at like a new Private by a USMC Lance Corporal and a Civilian Employee, presumably retired armed forces, as if they were pretending to be Drill Instructors. Whatever, this wasn't my first rodeo. I just stood there and took it. When we moved upstairs to the Med Floor, the first step was a file review. The technician looking at my file, pulled my documents, saw the notation about me being a combat veteran, and immediately apologized for being thrown in

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with the young Marine Candidates. From then on, I was front-loaded and enjoyed a very streamlined process, as the staff called me “Sir.”

The physician assigned my case review didn’t seem to like me much or care that I was a combat veteran. He asked me if I had ever broken any bones. I explained my medical history, including a broken ankle, on my first day of kindergarten. My mom thought I was faking it at the time, but the Children’s Hospital soon confirmed my story, and I wore a cast on my leg for some time. The MEPS doctor now shared my mother’s initial assertion as I could not identify which bones I had broken at age 5. “Why are you being intentionally misleading?” he asked. I wasn’t, and I failed to see how the question was relevant, mainly because it hadn’t prevented me from enlisting and serving before. It seemed a petty topic to knit-pick. I was asked to strip down naked and sit on an examination table. “What’s this on your knee?” I have had a varicose vein on my knee for most of my life. I admit it sometimes looks a bit awkward, especially when I’m exercising. It never presented a problem for me- I wrestled at the collegiate level with it and, again, enlisted the first time with it. “This is probably disqualifying.” It was amazing that this level of scrutiny was being applied during a recruiting and retention crisis. He informed me that he wasn’t confident he could approve me. I returned to the Navy Officer Recruiting Office on the same floor. The recruiter there was dumbfounded. “Doesn’t the Doc know you are already in?!”

I left the MEPS building that day without a determination. In the meantime, my process continued, and my packet was boarded (reviewed) for accession into the US Navy. They determined that based on my previous rank, my combat experience, my expertise in the civilian field, and my education (I’d recently attained my Ph.D.), I would enter the Navy Reserve at the rank of Lieutenant Commander (the equivalent of a Major in the Army). The world was a pretty turbulent place, and soldiers were genuinely concerned about lowering

standards in the Armed Forces and “wokeness,” a term for publicly emphasizing the appearance of diversity incentives over actual combat effectiveness. I had a lot to consider. Would I stay in the Army, go with the Navy, enter the inactive ready reserve, or hang up my boots? Hanging up my boots and walking away from a life of service, which defined me, seemed the least likely option until I met my wife.

I met my wife on a Catholic Dating website. It was love at first website (dad joke) for me. For her, it took a bit longer. Jodi Birkemeier lived in Putnam County, Ohio, about as far west as you could go without being in Indiana. She came from a farming family. I was a city boy. We started talking on the phone; I made the long drive about any chance I could. We went together to a wedding in Louisville, Kentucky, then another in San Diego, California. I’d say our relationship moved pretty fast. My grandmother had been having some arm pain and had a routine surgery scheduled at UPMC Saint Margaret Hospital in Pittsburgh. My mother passed away from terminal cancer in 2014, but even before that, she suffered violent seizures and was deaf. For the most part, my grandmother had raised me. Gram was in the operating room for 8 hours before the surgeon came out to speak with us. He had nicked a major artery. He wasn’t sure if she’d wake up. If she did wake up, he wasn’t sure if she’d have brain damage or other issues due to blood loss. It was an egregious medical error for which my grandmother had a clear lawsuit.

Still, my lawyer pointed out that UPMC was a mega-giant corporation that could hold it up in litigation and wait out my grandmother’s lifetime while outspending us. He recommended we let it go. When I called Jodi, her first words were, “Can I come out?” Typically, I would have said no. I liked to handle problems myself. I needed help asking for help. But this time, I yielded. “Yes, please come.” She quickly responded, “I’m glad you said that because I am coming anyways.” With God’s help, my grandmother pulled through and would live to

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meet her great-grandchildren. But that event sealed the deal for Jodi and me. This was more than just dating; this was dating for marriage, sacramental love.

Jodi and my conversations sometimes went to the military, and I was quick to share that in my heart, I felt that I was supposed to do something more in uniform. We talked about my time in Iraq, the good, the bad, and the ugly. We spoke about the deployment tempo, the near guarantee that in any Federal Force, there was a high likelihood that I would be called to deploy for at least three months at a time. Syria was a daily part of the news cycle at the time. We didn't want that. I didn't want to have children and then miss the first years of their life, as I had seen so many other soldiers do. I felt my age. I wasn't 18 anymore. I wasn't a college wrestler anymore. I was having trouble keeping up. So, though it's a source of pride that I passed my final Army Physical Fitness Test (barely- I had failed my previous one), I wondered if maybe I should walk away and leave our Nation's defense to the next generation. That was the way I was heading. I wanted to marry this woman. My priorities needed to shift.

I went to the gym to unwind, and after lifting, I decided to do some light cardio on a treadmill. I used my cell phone to play music during workouts, and I'd been getting many spam calls. I pressed the ignore button when the phone rang with an unknown phone number. A few moments later, I was annoyed when the same number tried again. This time they left a voicemail. "Hi Walter, this is Mark Williams. I wanted to talk to you about the Ohio Military Reserve. Give me a callback."



DISCOVERING THE OLD HOME GUARD

Lieutenant Colonel Mark Williams was unlike any officer of that rank I had ever met before. He was unpolished. Like myself, he was a Pennsylvania boy and a Christian. He was from Latrobe and went to Grove City College. My school, Thiel, and his competed in the same conference. When I called him in response to a voicemail he had left me, he acted like we were old friends, even though he and I had never met. He was animated and spoke of his college experience, football, and the theatre. I listened patiently for several minutes, wondering where the conversation was going. Finally, he got to the point, "I'm from the Ohio Military Reserve and was wondering if you could share any documents from your time on Pennsylvania's National Guard Homeland Response Force (H.R.F.)? We were trying to improve our emergency response capability and were hoping you could help." He didn't mention how he got my information or what

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led him to call me. I'd only been minimally involved with our H.R.F. while posted to the 128TH Brigade Support Battalion. I think I went to only two training events, and the one deployment we had- which was to support the U.S. Presidential Inauguration- I hadn't been personally called up for. I asked him, "What is the Ohio Military Reserve?"

I had been in the armed forces for a long time, and I had never heard about or worked with a State Military Reserve, also known as a "State Defense Force," "Organized State Militia," "Home Guard," or "State Guard." Was this a real thing?

It turns out it was.

In the United States, State Guards claim roots in the militias of our first thirteen founding colonies. Militia membership was widely considered to be a civic responsibility. All able-bodied men were expected to participate in the defense of their homes. In period movies, sometimes you will see when a fire breaks out, the town rings a church bell, and all the citizens get their buckets to help fight the fire in any way they can because the fire is a threat to all. The militias worked the same way, but you'd bring your musket instead of a bucket. Today state defense forces (S.D.F.s) are military units that operate under the sole authority of a state government. State defense forces are authorized by state and federal law and are under the command of the Governor of each state.

State defense forces are distinct from their state's National Guard counterparts in that they cannot become federal entities. A State Guard cannot be activated under Title 10 or Title 32 Orders by law. That may change in the future, but it would take an act of Congress and the approval and cooperation of the state-level governments to change. All state National Guard can be federalized under the National Defense Act Amendments of 1933, officially recognizing the National Guard of the United States. This framework provides the basis for integrating the Army National Guard units and personnel

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into the U.S. Army. This concept needs to be clarified. While at home, as a National Guardsman, my commander-in-chief was my Governor. When I deployed to Iraq, my Commander-in-Chief became the President of the United States. The latter is not possible in the S.D.F.s. The National Guard claims to have been founded on December 13, 1636. This date was before the Nation was established and we declared our Independence.

The 28th Infantry Division is the oldest Division in the Federalized National Guard. Though it has units that can trace their lineage back to Benjamin Franklin in 1747 (111th Infantry Regiment), the Division wasn't officially formed and recognized federally until 1879. It quickly becomes apparent why this topic needs to be clarified. In this example, 1636, 1747, and 1879 can all be claimed as the date of organization, depending on whom you ask. When you visit a Civil War Battlefield, you will see monuments to the U.S. Army and Army of the Potomac, but you will also see monuments to the 20th Maine, the 75th Ohio, the 1st Minnesota, or the 127th Pennsylvania. You probably didn't know it, but those latter units weren't U.S. Army units, even though they fell under the Army for campaigns like Gettysburg. They were State Guard. Some units would go on to be State Guard; the National Guard would absorb others, while most would eventually be mustered out of service altogether.

The federal government recognizes state defense forces, as per the Compact Clause of the U.S. Constitution, under 32 U.S.C. § 109, which provides that state defense forces as a whole may not be called, ordered, or drafted into the armed forces of the United States, thus preserving their separation from the National Guard. However, under the same law, individual members serving in the state defense force are not exempt from service in the armed forces (i.e., they are not excluded from the draft). Under 32 U.S.C. § 109(e), "A person may not

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become a member of a defense force ... if he is a member of a reserve component of the armed forces.”

Nearly every state has laws authorizing state defense forces, and twenty-three states have active forces with different levels of activity, support, and strength. State defense forces generally operate with emergency management and homeland security missions. Most S.D.F.s are organized as ground units, but air and naval units also exist. In Ohio, the Naval Militia regularly patrols Lake Erie and the waterways around Camp Perry Joint Training Center.

Mark Williams explained this in his way, answering my questions individually.

WHAT IS YOUR MISSION?

The Ohio Military Reserve used to have a military police mission but recently transitioned to an emergency management mission. Today FEMA Emergency Support Functions (E.S.F.) 6 and 7, which include aiding in operating mass care facilities (E.S.F. 6) and warehouses, distribution centers, and support facilities (E.S.F. 7), are our core mission.

DO YOU EVER DEPLOY?

We deployed recently to respond to Tornadoes in Dayton, but only three soldiers deployed, our only activation since World War II. We rarely deploy.

WHAT'S TRAINING LIKE?

We don't utilize weapons anymore, but other than that, we focus on meeting all of the Army Warrior Tasks and Skills. We cater that training to emergency management rather than warfighting.

WITHOUT GRIT

DO YOU HAVE PHYSICAL FITNESS STANDARDS?

Yes, Instead of the Army's 2-mile run, 2 minutes of push-ups, and 2 minutes of sit-ups, we do a 1-mile run, 1 minute of push-ups, and 1 minute of sit-ups. We also have height-weight standards patterned off of the Army's.

DO YOU RECEIVE AWARDS?

Yes, we are also eligible for Ohio National Guard Awards on top of our own awards program. We aren't eligible for any Federal Awards.

WHAT IS THE TIME REQUIREMENT?

You get out of it what you put in, but you are expected to drill one day a month (versus 2 for the National Guard) and for one week in the summer (again, versus two for the National Guard). The more time you give, the faster you can advance because you are only eligible for below-the-zone (half the time) promotions if you meet the National Guard standards and drill two days instead of one.

ARE THERE EMPLOYER PROTECTIONS FOR SOLDIERS?

Yes, our orders are lawful orders with the authority of the Governor and the Ohio National Guard, so our soldiers are protected under the *Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act* (USERRA). For all intents and purposes, they are members of the Ohio National Guard Team.

WHAT ENTITY COMMISSIONS YOUR OFFICERS?

Our officers receive their appointment documents directly from the Governor of the State. The authority to con-

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sider and grant officer commissions is delegated to Major General John Harris, the Adjutant General of the Ohio National Guard.

WHY HAVEN'T I HEARD OF YOU?

Pennsylvania no longer has an S.D.F. The Pennsylvania National Guard absorbed it. The National Guard has been hyper-focused on warfighting, so there was no reason for the National Guard to interact with the S.D.F., despite our work. We are constantly interviewing for our jobs. Previous Adjutant Generals didn't see our value.

WHAT'S THE PAY LIKE?

We are an all-volunteer unpaid force most of the time. If we get called up for a State Active Duty Mission, we are paid precisely like our National Guard counterparts based on rank, time in grade, and time in service.

After all my questions, Mark said, "Sounds like you might want to join."

I wasn't sold, but I said I'd e-mail him my resume. I also told him I'd sync up with a friend more intimate with the H.R.F. than I was. He had 700+ pages of H.R.F. documentation and my resume within an hour. He told me I "had to join" and that they needed me. By that time, Jodi and I were engaged to be married. I told him I was getting married in late December and would ring him after the honeymoon. He wished me well, and we hung up with each other.

I didn't know it then, but the following weekend was a drill weekend for Mark and the Headquarters element of the Ohio Military Reserve. After the day's activity concluded, he walked back to the S4 area of the armory. He would spend the night there. In the evening, they

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opened the large bay garage doors, wore comfortable clothing, and yakked with each other. On this Saturday night, I would become the topic of conversation for Mark Williams, Charles Defer, and Brian Reeder. “I got this resume from this guy in Pittsburgh. I spoke to him, and he seemed to be pretty together, but he has a doctorate, combat experience, is a successful business management consultant, is in good physical shape, and is relatively young. I can’t believe he is real, and I’m not sure he would fit in here with our culture. He’s too high-speed. He’s a catfish.” The conversation quickly shifted. The three went on to talk about all sorts of other things.

I was married later that month. We honeymooned in St. Lucia and moved into our new home in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania. A lot was going on in my life. My wife and I talked about my future in the military, and after careful thought and prayer, we decided to give the Ohio Military Reserve a chance. From our perspective, I would never have to deploy overseas or at home for an extended period. It would be pretty straightforward. It would be a way to keep one foot in both worlds, military and civilian. I decided to give it a shot.



Governor



Adjutant General



**Ohio Army
National Guard**
(Federal & State)



**State Defense
Forces**
(State only)



**Ohio Air
National Guard**
(Federal & State)



**Ohio Cyber
Reserve**
(State only)



**Ohio Military
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