Tough It Out (It’s Worth It!)

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"I don't care. I am leaving the army anyway." These nine words are heard in COFs throughout the Army. They also happen to be the nine words that upset me the most because, embarrassingly, I used to say them more often than anyone else. This disenfranchisement with the military stems from, in my case and I believe in the case of many others, a perceived lack of purpose and responsibility.

I approached joining the Army with the attitude of one who has probably seen too many movies. I didn't think about any of the crucial daily tasks necessary to keep our Army functional and effective. Instead, I created the illusion that every day would be like a Rambo film; and was understandably taken aback when reality presented itself. As an 11B Infantryman, there are days full of action and excitement, but there are even more which are characterized by drudging through maintenance, inventory, etc.

Motivation comes naturally on the exciting, engaging days. However, it's the days that "aren't what I signed up for," which tend to sap morale. I am consciously aware that, regardless of the situation, there shouldn't be stipulations that need to be met for me to perform my job. But as time passes, it becomes harder to focus on that, instead of getting bogged down by the minutiae of everyday life. I am ashamed to admit I reached a point of total indifference. I couldn't see a reason behind the work we were doing anymore. I decided that I was leaving the army as soon as possible and resigned myself to doing the bare minimum until then.

"Shamming" became my new status quo. I would do my job adequately enough to avoid being noticed, but take every shortcut along the way. I took no pride or pleasure in my work and wasn't doing the Army, or myself for that matter, any favors. This attitude probably would have persisted until I left the Army, to do god knows what, if a stroke of luck didn't change everything.

Whether it was a lack of human resources or an attempt by my leadership to broaden my knowledge I can't be sure. But I was given the position of interim team leader, the length of which would be dependent on my performance. At first, I had mixed feelings about the situation. My mindset at the time was such that any additional work was to be avoided at all costs. However, being unable to refuse the position, I proceeded to prepare for a team live fire the following day.

The following morning was inspirational and began my transformation into the Soldier I am today. The feelings of purpose and responsibility that came over me training, preparing and leading my Soldiers was similar to what I imagine a new parent must feel. I moved into that team exercise reborn. My Soldiers were relying on me to provide them with direction, set them up for success and most importantly, care for them. I was no longer concerned about myself. My Soldiers became my priority; and as a result, I felt the motivation, pride, and sense of fulfillment for which I had always been searching.

This was my experience, and although it changed both my military career and my life, the same might not hold true for everyone. I can personally attest to the fact that it isn't always easy to tough it out. However, it is my firm belief that any Soldier who gives up and leaves the army without at least attempting to find his purpose is doing themselves a huge disservice. Do not make rash decisions before you have experienced everything the Army has to offer. Occupy a leadership position, try out different roles and always strive for more responsibility. I promise it is worth it. After all, it could change your life.