

Vietnam Veterans of America Essay

“What my training and participation in JROTC has meant to me.”

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I wish I knew about the program earlier so I could have joined as a freshman. The program is hosted at East High in the Waterloo school district. Unfortunately, this program is hardly advertised throughout the Cedar Falls district, I was only able to find out about it through a small poster in the hallway. So many students are missing out on this amazing opportunity, JROTC offers a chance to grow as a person, create connections and build leadership skills.

Do I regret my decision to join the program? Absolutely not this class has taught me so much about myself as an individual and also allowed me to receive another perspective of life and discipline. When I first joined I knew it was going to be a difficult path, but what I did not realize is that so many people would be there to help me through. JROTC does have a military curriculum but that does not mean you are alone for the whole ride. I learned that being nervous was totally normal especially when trying something new and I was extremely lucky to be a part of an amazing company for my first semester. The program was nothing of what I thought it would be, my mindset set was mainly on the fact that it was military based and I figured that most of the activities would be physically challenging. It turned out to be more character-building and leadership training in the classroom and taking those skills into our community. The outcome of just that single semester allowed me to build communication skills and to have confidence in myself, now I am able to walk into a new place and feel totally comfortable with myself and extremely positive with opportunities that lie ahead.

Being a Cedar Falls student while also attending East High for this class is difficult, but pushes me to create balance within my lifestyle that I never experienced before. Having balance in your life is something that I struggle with but I am confident in myself and my friends within JROTC that by the end of my senior year I will be able to say that I have found the balance within. There are times when we would have Physical Training (PT) which usually fell on

Fridays and is personally my favorite day. These days would allow our company to work outside the classroom and show off our leadership skills and abilities that we have learned about and built up during the week. JROTC Fridays give us the chance to work on strength and conditioning while actively collaborating to complete the challenge.

JROTC has also opened opportunities for me to work in the community through volunteering. It has allowed me to participate in the community by helping out the Food Bank, Salvation Army, American Legion and helping assemble flags for Veterans Day. These opportunities have influenced me in a way that was unexpected, when I was younger I would volunteer with my family. JROTC reminded me of how good it felt to be a part of something that would make a difference no matter how small. I have enjoyed these activities so much and I am excited to continue to volunteer at these places. I have just recently participated in the American Legion and being a part of that was exhilarating, it kept me on my toes while also challenging my leadership ability. Finally it inspired me to apply for and get accepted into the Waterloo Youth City Council (WYCC) which requires me to meet at the Waterloo Playhouse once a month to discuss issues the community of Waterloo is facing. For this year's topic we have chosen to do mental health, and in light of Covid we have come up with the phrase "un-mask mental health". Through JROTC and WYCC I have learned that citizenship requires being actively involved while also being passionate about making a difference in the community.

In a nutshell, JROTC has made an enormous impact on my lifestyle and has influenced many habits that I had created over the years. And when I hopefully become successful in whatever I do in the future, I'm going to be extremely grateful for the opportunities and training that I received from this class. All the challenges to prove myself and show that I am a team leader caused me to create tough skin for the harsh reality that lies outside the High School walls.

And all my success goes to Lieutenant Colonel Keith and Master Sergeant Stoen for helping me find a new me, a more successful and happier version of myself.