



By McKenzie Dull

My dad was a soldier in the United States Army long before I was born. It is all I have ever known. Being around people who serve is a way of life to me and something I took for granted and did not fully understand. It wasn't until recently, after watching the 2022 West Point [commencement speech](#) given by General Mark Milley, that I discovered the incredible responsibility those who serve willingly take. Simply stated, it became clear to me that their task is to support and defend the idea of America and to do so with convicted courage and character.

Because of my dad's roles and responsibilities, my siblings and I have been able to be around some pretty cool people; whether an Officer, NCO, or Army Cadet, there are insights that have stuck with me that I believe are important for our nation to understand.

Namely, it's in the way they talk. It's like they have a different language, and the words they use have special meaning because they actually live them out. Whether at the dinner table, in the gym, or in small social groups, these men and women use words such as honor, courage, and respect. However, these aren't buzzwords, but rather definitions of who they are and how they live as servicemembers in service to our country.

I've heard them discuss what it means for them to put their lives on the line, but more

importantly, what it means for them to ask the people they lead to put *their lives* on the line. I've listened to them weigh the responsibility and honor that is fundamental to this calling. I have heard them discuss problems while encouraging one another to solve these difficulties with integrity.

Make no mistake, these aren't perfect people, and they do mess up, but they lead with character on behalf of our country in everything they do. I have heard my dad tell his cadets that, "*no matter what, lead with your honor intact,*" and to "*leave no doubt.*" They attempt to pursue character in everything they do.

Ultimately, he, his friends, and fellow brothers and sisters in arms fight and represent our nation with honor, the *right way*. More importantly, that *right way* bleeds into my family and I enjoy those same conversations. Even though I may not serve in the military, their value system is an example for how I should live and act in my everyday life. I am glad that my dad has given me the opportunity to be around such people, as they are examples to me on how to live every day.

McKenzie Dull is an Army kid, a daughter of an Army Officer, and a rising high school junior. She lives with her parents, sister, and brother at West Point, NY.

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