Letters

Why are you in the Army?

When I was about to graduate from high school and join the Army in 1988, I was a bit nervous about how difficult my life might become. My older brother, another service member, advised me, "Don't quit something because you don't like it. Quit because you've found something better to do." Over 14 years later, his advice is still sound. I can't think of anything better to do than serving in our Army.

It's important to think about why you're in the Army from time to time. After reflection, I've outlined some important reasons why I enjoy serving:

Working with NCOs. I've seen some of the best examples of leadership in the Army while working with NCOs. When I think of training leaders, I'm reminded of one command sergeant major's well-run NCO Development Program and the way he took a personal interest in helping soldiers and NCOs face challenges and grow. When it comes to setting the example, I think of a certain first sergeant who could outrun anyone in the company and knew more about maintaining our tracked vehicles than most of the mechanics, but inspired them all to excel instead of pointing out their shortcomings. I think of a sergeant first class who, when it comes to competence, was an expert in absolutely every area of light combat engineer knowledge, tactics, and skill. For sacrifice, I'm reminded of a staff sergeant who gave up a coveted platoon sergeant job so he could deploy with rest of the company to Bosnia and support it as the Operations NCO. In the area of motivation, I think of a sergeant who trains cadets on light infantry platoon operations. He actually got them excited about digging individual fighting positions in the sweltering heat of July.

Challenge. Every day in the Army is a challenge. Every day is a call to excel. The call may come as an Army Physical Fitness Test, a training exercise, an inspection of your unit, or even a counseling session with a soldier who has financial problems. Some days there are more challenges than we might want, but there's never a shortage. I can't imagine what it would be like to work in a job or profession that doesn't challenge you. I hope I never have to find out.

Camaraderie. Not every person in the Army is your best friend, but everyone you serve with, train with, deploy with, or undergo any other hardship together is your comrade. I'm sure there are people you've argued with over how to accomplish a given mission or task, but they're still your comrades. What is a comrade? It's someone you'd bend over backwards to help out 10 years after you've last seen them. It's also someone who would do the same for you.

Focus. Everyone wants to be in the best unit, ready for war or any other mission our country gives them. To paraphrase Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, "Nobody goes down to the recruiter and says 'I want to join the Army so I can screw up.'" Everyone wants to do their best. If you can acknowledge that motivation, the rest of the work is helping them learn the skills and techniques to be individually competent, along with developing the teamwork to work well as a unit. I'm not saying that it's easy. It's a challenge for everyone, but I appreciate that we're all focused on the same end state — competent soldiers in trained and ready units.

Service. Every enlisted soldier, every NCO and every officer serves their Army and their country every day. Whether qualifying on a weapon, maintaining a vehicle or providing medical aid to an injured family member… all of us provide an invaluable service that helps our unit readiness, directly or indirectly. In doing everyday activities, we make our Army better prepared to serve the nation.

Your list probably doesn't agree with mine. That's okay, because this article isn't about whether my list is correct. It's about your list. Take the time to think about your own personal list and write it down. Then share it with a quality enlisted soldier, NCO, or officer who you know is thinking about getting out of our Army. If you want to help them make a good decision, share your perspective on why you enjoy serving in the Army. They'll make their own decision, but at least you'll help them make an informed one.

Capt. Brian J. Lunday
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High standards for all?

I am deeply dismayed at the published quote on the back of the Summer 2002 edition by deceased President Woodrow Wilson. The fact of the matter is that President Wilson's standards were "so high," he literally "resegregated" the military, the country and the White House after a brief period of equality for African Americans. History books were changed during this period, and White and Black people were separated based on his "high standards." President Wilson would have been appalled to have his "high standards" quote beneath the photograph of an African American soldier like the one [the "Journal"] displayed. The crown President Wilson spoke of so eloquently in his address to the soldiers in 1917 was a crown specifically intended for one race. I strongly suggest you do your research before publishing insults to injuries for hundreds of African American soldiers during Wilson's tenure. "American Patriots" by Gail Buckley is a good start.

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I selected the quote referred to, and I was indeed unaware of its impact on to the African American community. All who found the remark offensive have my apology.

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