

The following letter was written by an Air Force Academy cadet as an assignment for his Character Class. The assignment asked the cadets to explain why they returned after winter break.



So after our sunburns have faded and the memories of our winter break have been reduced to pictures we've pinned on our desk boards, and once again we've exchanged t-shirts and swim suits for flight suits and camouflage, there still remains the question that every cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs has asked themselves at some point: **Why did we come back? Why, after spending two weeks with our family would we return to one of the most demanding lifestyles in the country?** After listening to our 'friends' who are home from State or Ivy League schools chock full of wisdom about how our war in Iraq is unjust and unworldly, why would we return? And after watching the news and reading the papers which only seem to condemn the military's every mistake and shadow every victory, why would we continue to think it is worth the sacrifice of a normal college life?

Is it because the institution to which we belong is tuition-free? Anyone who claims this has forgotten that we will, by the time we graduate, repay the U.S. taxpayer many times over in blood, sweat, and tears. Is it because the schooling we are receiving is one of the best undergraduate educations in the country? While the quality of the education is second to none, anyone who provides this as a main reason has lost sight of the awesome responsibility that awaits those who are tough enough to graduate and become commissioned officers in the U.S. Air Force.

I come back to the Academy because I want to have the training necessary so that one day I'll have the incredible responsibility of leading the sons and daughters of America in combat. These men and women will never ask about my Academy grade point average, their only concern will be that I have the ability to lead them expertly – I will be humbled to earn their respect.

I come back to the Academy because I want to be the commander who saves lives by negotiating with Arab leaders... in their own language. I come back to the Academy because, if called upon, I want to be the pilot who flies half way around the world with three mid-air refuelings to send a bomb from 30,000 feet into a basement housing the enemy... through a ventilation shaft two feet wide. **Becoming an officer in today's modern Air Force is so much more than just command; it is being a diplomat, a strategist, a communicator, a moral compass, but always a warrior first.**

I come back to the Air Force Academy because right now the United States is fighting a global war that is an 'away game' in Iraq – taking the fight to the terrorists. And whether or not we think the terrorists were in Iraq before our invasion, they are unquestionably there now. And if there is any doubt as to whether this is a global war, just ask the people in Amman, in London, in Madrid, in Casablanca, in Riyadh, and in Bali. This war must remain an away game because we have seen what happens when it becomes a home game... I come back to the Academy because I want to be a part of that fight. I come back to the Academy because I don't want my vacationing family to board a bus in Paris that gets blown away by someone who thinks that it would be a good idea to convert the Western world to Islam. I come back to the Academy because I don't want the woman I love to be the one who dials her last frantic cell phone call while huddled in the back of an airliner with a hundred other people seconds away from slamming into the Capitol building. I come back to the Academy because during my freshman year of high school I sat in a geometry class and watched nineteen terrorists change the course of history live on television. **For the first time, every class currently at a U.S. Service Academy made the decision to join after the 2001 terror attacks.** Some have said that the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan only created more terrorists... I say that the attacks of September 11th, 2001 created an untold number of more American soldiers; I go to school with 4,000 of them. – And that's worth missing more than a few frat parties.