

on the MOVE

MILITARY MINDED

Story by Mike Latona • Photographs by Greg Francis



Scott Kyle, 19, shares a special military bond with his father James, who served as an Army Special Forces sergeant in the Vietnam War. Scott said that his dad supported — but did not force — his own decision to join the Army National Guard last year.

Thirty years ago, when our nation became divided over its role in the Vietnam War, the issue of military duty was more hotly debated than at any other time in recent U.S. history.

Although not as hot a topic today, teens interviewed for this story offered differing viewpoints on whether entering the military life should be a *choice* or an *obligation*.

Lisa Dundas said she admires her uncle, an Army lieutenant colonel who served in the Persian Gulf War; and her grandfather, a former Marine who fought in World War II. But Lisa doesn't feel obligated to continue the family legacy by pursuing a military career.

"I'd probably never join," remarked Lisa, 16, a junior at Our Lady of Mercy High School and a parishioner at St. Michael's Church in Newark.

However, when asked how she'd feel if the United States were to go to war, her viewpoint changed quickly.

"If I was 18, I'd be proud to go. You're defending your country, you're helping your country. I think it would be a great thing to do," Lisa said.

With the same desire to defend his country, Dan Zuniga is preparing to enter the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., this summer.

"I'm a little idealistic, but I consider everybody in my country my family. The amount of rights we have — we take so many things for granted. I don't want to let that be ruined by others," said Dan, 17, a senior at McQuaid Jesuit High School and parishioner at St. Anne Church in Rochester.

Dan plans to make an eight-year commitment — five years of active duty and three years of reserve duty. In return, the Navy will finance his college education as he pursues a career in chemistry.

Scott Kyle, also, is getting educational assistance through his eight-year stint in the U.S. Army National Guard, which began last year. The Guard will finance Scott's tuition as long as he attends a state college in New York. He plans to attend SUNY Brockport next fall as a criminal justice major.

Scott spent five months at infantry school last summer. His only current obligation is to train one weekend per month with his 108th



Infantry brigade in Geneseo and Batavia.

"On those weekends I bust my butt, but it's just a blast. I love it so far," said Scott, 19, from St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Scottsville.

Scott noted that he can decide on a full-

time commitment at any point, yet he could automatically be pressed into full-time duty if the U.S. became involved in a conflict.

Prior to joining the Guard, Scott said his father — who saw Army combat duty in the Vietnam War — had asked him how he'd feel if he were called upon to kill somebody.

"I said that if I have to do it, I'll do it," Scott said.

When Scott made his final decision to enlist, he recalled, his father "stuck up for me and stood behind my choice. He wrote letters to me, saying he was proud of me."

Because the military is rigorous and could even cost him his life, Dan said that his decision to join the Navy came slowly.

"I spent many a night sitting in bed until 3 a.m., with my eyes wide open," Dan said.

Dan got a firsthand taste of what was in store for him when he attended a trial program in Annapolis last summer. He and other young men and women endured drills that included heavy exercise and tongue-lashings from officers who "were four inches from your face," he said.

Dan recalled that a tall, outgoing boy had been poking fun at a small, shy girl at the beginning of the trial program. But as it turned out, it wasn't the girl who cracked under the pressure once training intensified.

"Then there she was, staring straight ahead and poised. And he was crying like a baby. He didn't bother her any more," Dan remarked.

"I guess you have to be the right kind of

person to want to do it," he added.

Trey Stone, 13, doesn't consider himself to be that kind of person. And the McQuaid Jesuit Middle School eighth-grader simply believes that military life should be a matter of choice.

"It's great if you want to do it; I'm happy for you. It's a decent living and you get money for college," Trey said. "But it's an individual's opinion. If you don't want to serve and you're not drafted, you shouldn't have to go."

Trey also has reservations about the power of government officials to enforce a draft.

"They sit in their air-conditioned offices. I don't think it should be their decision to send your friends and family off to war when they don't have to go themselves," Trey said.

Trey is not alone in his doubt about certain aspects of the military. For instance, the presence of the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corp (JROTC) in high schools was debated during a November seminar at Rochester's Corpus Christi Church. The JROTC issue was also raised in a guest essay on the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle's* editorial page last September.

"Let's not pretend: The military is teaching soldiers to kill, although it's in the name of defense, patriotism, character-building and the like," wrote Rochester's Vincent Weltzer.

Yet Dan stated that JROTC, along with military recruiters who visit schools, need to promote the military while students still have time to make a choice.

"By the time they get to college, they're going to have their lives set," Dan said.

Dan said he struggles to understand why people would discourage young men and women from considering service to their country through the military.

"When people criticize other people's sacrifices, it makes me a little angry," he said.

Scott echoed that sentiment, saying, "I'm a very patriotic person. One of the reasons I joined was to fight for my country."

"A lot of people I talk to frown upon it — but if I do go to war and die for my country, I die for the right reasons," Scott added.

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