



The DoD Times (Redacted)



So, Your Daughter Is Thinking About Joining the Military – Our Thoughts

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Check out our Podcast, *The Star Chamber*, on: [Apple](#) | [Spotify](#) | [YouTube](#)

This week, a fellow West Point graduate—a father of two sons (one at West Point and one in Army ROTC) and a daughter (a high school junior considering commissioning into the Army or Air Force)—reached out to me via LinkedIn seeking "words of wisdom" to share with his daughter as she considers her options. He has listened to our podcast, [The Star Chamber](#), and is concerned that his daughter may face the same challenges I encountered during my career. Ryan and I believe our reflections are worth sharing with the larger community.

Francesca's Reflections:

X,

Thank you for reaching out to me. For quite some time, I have pondered how best to answer this question if asked directly, so I appreciate you motivating me to put my thoughts into words.

Short answer: you should be worried. For all your children. Your sons likely will be bullied by men (and some women) who are trying to size them up in the eternal game of dominance. Your daughter likely will be harassed (sexually and otherwise) and face gender-based discrimination by men (and some women) who likewise are interested in the game of dominance, though (most often) for different reasons. Further, if your sons or daughter somehow end up on the wrong side of someone's law (carefully chosen words there), their Constitutional rights of due process are nearly non-existent.

That said, I would not trade my military service for anything. I love West Point, the Army, and the rare chance I had to serve in an honored profession. I love what West Point, and the Army stand for, but I am deeply concerned – as our podcast highlights – with the abuses of authority that are too easily met out using the administrative investigative and punishment systems.

Should your daughter join? I would like to provide some general thoughts. I provide these thoughts as a woman who wore a uniform for 26 years and as someone who continues to serve our military through the [Walk the Talk](#)



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Foundation. Following my thoughts are Ryan's. Like you, he is the father of a daughter, and I believe his perspective is important to provide a comprehensive response to your query.

Many times, I've been asked to describe my experience at the Academy / in the Army / in the Airborne community "as a woman." My normal response goes something like, "well, I don't know – I was trying to survive just like everyone else." This is partly true. Many of the men I worked with struggled to overcome their own limitations, just as I struggled to overcome mine. As someone who is an unabashed people watcher, I could see the struggle of these men. I both sympathized and empathized with them. This and the fact that I am the youngest of four and the only daughter perhaps helps me to understand the societal pressures that men must endure, of which I know there are many. For these reasons, I've always balked at being separated / segregated / defined from "the struggle" because of my sex. We all struggle.

At the conclusion of my mandatory 5-year service commitment, I began to understand that my decision to stay in the Army, despite the constant sexual harassment (from West Point forward) and one sexual assault (when I was in company command and stationed in Kuwait), had to do with my belief that service in the Army was honorable and that I had a rare (in the context of history) opportunity to be a part of this profession. You may say to yourself, yes, this is the reason most people have for staying past their first term, and I agree with you. I think for women, however, this reason for staying in the military is especially relevant to your question.

Women in the military face a paradox. On one hand, joining the military means exposing themselves to potential abuse. On the other, avoiding service risks reinforcing stereotypes that women aren't "cut out" for military life. Historically, this exclusion relegated women to roles deemed "safe" or confined to the home. Many of us grapple with whether our physical safety is more important than our ability—and the ability of future generations—to choose our professional paths. These ideas are foreign to a man's experience, and so are unconsidered, dismissed, minimized, criticized, or misunderstood.

Further, these decisions – understandably – are damn'd near impossible for any father worth his salt to stomach. Knowing this, many women who decide to join the military and, more tellingly, to stay, gloss over or minimize the abuse and the trauma so that they are not shut out from a profession that we're told is honorable and that we know was not always available to our sex.

Despite the challenges, military service holds profound societal significance. Women who serve value being part of a profession long considered honorable, even if that choice exposes them to unique challenges and misunderstandings. I still encounter individuals who feel the need to lecture me on what military service entails, which reflects broader assumptions about women in uniform.

Why does your daughter want to join the military? Perhaps it is as simple as, because she can. Or perhaps she idolizes her dad / a grandparent who served, or she idolizes her brothers, or she doesn't want to be "left out" when her brothers are joining the military, or perhaps she knows how proud you are of your sons (this is an assumption), and she wants her father's pride to pour out equally onto her, or perhaps, or perhaps... Whatever her motivation, the risks and challenges she faces will differ from those of her brothers, and she must weigh these carefully.

A final thought – for all your children. A mentor closed an email to me in Oct 2023 with the following advice (we were discussing a book): "Finally, Eisen discusses the rationale and importance of having the "best alternative to a negotiated agreement." This, on a personal level, is why you always want to have enough money packed away to be able to say "fuck you!" And, walk away from it all."



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After my [heartbreaking conversation with LTG Potter](#) in Dec 2023, this is exactly what I did – walked away from it all. After 26 years, I had culminated. My reasons for staying in the Army no longer outweighed my reasons for leaving. And I had enough money packed away to be able to say, “fuck you!”

Yours,
Francesca

Ryan's Reflections:

X,

Thank you for reaching out and for following along on [The Star Chamber](#)! I have some insights and although not nearly as eloquent or well thought-out as Francesca's, I invite you to read and share these, nonetheless. For context, I come at this question as not only a father of a service-age daughter, but also as an advisor, mentor, and confidant to over 400 current and former service members (i.e. my [Foundation's](#) clients) who have been betrayed by our military. I also approach this as a person who would say in the same breath that my 26 years in the Air Force was an incredible experience I would not trade for anything, but that I would also not recommend to anyone I love, care for, or trust.

Two years ago, my daughter approached me and asked me what I thought of her serving in the military. A “brat” herself, she had thoroughly enjoyed her 14-year adventure, having lived abroad for over 11 of those years. We often joke about the time we asked her what she wanted for her 10th birthday, and she quickly replied: “to have a croissant atop the Eiffel Tower!” And since we lived a mere 3-hour drive from Paris at the time, she got her wish. The “highlight” when I was 10 was driving up to the Wisconsin Dells...here's my daughter having pastries in France! I digress... The point is, she loved her globe-trotting adventures which were my Air Force career, and yet, my answer to her question about serving in the military, despite her positive experiences, and despite my love for the opportunities I was afforded, was simply: “You deserve better.” Crazy to read this even as I type it. An Air Force Academy graduate and fighter pilot, I was your proverbial “Captain America” – I was and could have remained – a walking recruiting station. I loved it – the honor of serving something bigger than myself or the almighty dollar. I felt it was a calling, not only to serve the greater good, but to be part of an institution that was, and I say this non-egotistically, better than the rest. And then, later in my career, I began to see the other side of our Department of Defense – the seedy underbelly which is the exact antithesis of everything we believed in, were told, and/or fought for, best juxtaposed with my Air Force's core values: Integrity, Excellence, and Service Before Self. I began to see the self-servitude and flaccidity of our leadership, the moral corruption of the institution, and the true root and drivers of our fruitless armed conflicts: not democracy or freedom, but the powerful lobby and the feeding of the insatiable Military Industrial Complex.

But even with that all said, I still would not dissuade my child or others from serving. The true root of why I would not recommend service now comes down to this rather simple binary question that I asked myself two years ago: “Would I entrust the welfare of my child to the U.S. Military?” And that answer, then and still now, is a resounding **NO**. Is there a chance that your children will serve dutifully and honorably and enjoy the fortune of staying away from the frays of injustice, harassment, abuse and/or rape? Yes, absolutely. In fact, statistically, they would be in the majority still, albeit a steadily declining one. But then there is that more-than-insignificant probability that they will not; that they will succumb to a wrong, or a crime, or multiple abuses or crimes, and be left to fend for themselves in systems of “justice” which mirror nothing of any American Justice system that I know of or have learned about. And it is at this juncture, the same point where thousands of honorably serving service members have found themselves in over the last decade, where one has little to no recourse; veritably zero hope against a military which operates routinely outside the bounds of the law and our Constitution and does so with impunity.



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To further stack the deck, that individual, oftentimes not even afforded counsel or representation, goes up against a military that has veritably unlimited resources to out-wait, stall, defame, libel, slander, cover up, conspire, collude, and ultimately deny someone their rights all while grinding them into dust both personally and professionally.

Reading this twenty years ago, I would have simply scoffed at the above paragraphs – writing them off as the blasphemous work of some “disgruntled”, but today they ring true...too true, sadly, and not just for me, but for literally tens of thousands. I surmise you will begin to hear more of those recounts of disappointment and betrayal continue to emerge in the coming years....

In the meantime, however, I wish you and your children all the best. God bless America, and those who serve it *honorably*.

Sincerely,
Ryan

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- Find your Representative here: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Find your Senator here: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>

Feel free to reach out privately at francescagraham@walkthetalkfoundation.org or in the comments.

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2. [SIGN THIS PETITION](#) demanding real anti-harassment reform in the Military and Coast Guard now.
3. [SIGN THIS PETITION](#) urging the Supreme Court of the United States to hear the case of Staff Sergeant Ryan Carter who was paralyzed from the chest down following a routine surgery at Walter Reed.

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