

I Don't Want To Be a Soldier Today

Sean Taylor

I always wanted to be a soldier. I guess it came from watching the old World War II movies on Saturday afternoons. The idea wasn't popular in my house when I was young. I had asthma. I wasn't strong. I wasn't brave. But, oh, how I wanted to be a soldier. *Maybe, someday.*

I got married. I had children. I got a job as a school psychologist. I got old and my dream of being a soldier faded away. Then the attacks on 9/11 occurred and my childhood dream returned. I could no longer ignore it. It consumed me.

My cousin Jake wasn't old. He was young. And he was an Army Ranger. I secretly wanted to be Jake, the ultimate in cool. Sure, the Jake I heard about was in family stories. I hadn't seen him since he was a kid. But, oh, how I clung to those stories. I heard he was in Colombia. I served as a missionary in Colombia; *does that count?*

No, but I am young still. I am brave. *I can be a soldier, can't I?* On October 24, 2002, I raised my hand and enlisted in the United States Army National Guard, three days before I would be too old. I went to basic training and then to Officer Candidate School as Jake went to Baghdad.

I walk a little taller now. I have pride when I put on the uniform. It looks good on me. My kids think I am one of the strongest men in the world. I love being a soldier. I love my family.

At forty-two, I went to Air Assault School at Ft. Benning, Georgia. It was the hardest thing I have ever done. Of the close to 200 who started the course, only around 140 of us graduated; only one was older than me. And best of all, my cool Airborne Ranger cousin Jake pinned the wings on my chest. He did it the right way, when no one was looking, like I hoped he would.

I woke this morning and put on my uniform, ready for another drill weekend. I look good in the uniform, with the air assault badge. We are preparing to deploy to Afghanistan, so this drill will be a week long. I don't get to go with my family to the Mall of America for spring break, but that's okay. I am a soldier. I am brave.

But as I'm walking out the door the phone rings and I learn that Jake, my brave, cool cousin, was killed in Afghanistan last night. I don't want to be a soldier today. I don't want to be cool. I don't want to be brave. I want to cry and soldiers don't cry. I drive down to drill, but turn around. I don't want to be a soldier today. I come back home and take off my boots and my uniform. Today I want to mourn for my dear Aunt Amy and for all those families that have sacrificed their children to War.

Tomorrow morning I will put on the uniform. I will not secretly smile and think I am cool when I see my air assault badge in the mirror. It means something different now. Yes, tomorrow I will be proud to be counted as a soldier, but not today.

