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## Post 9-11 Veterans Reflect on their Call To Service

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# Post 9-11 Veterans Reflect On Their Call To Service

by Jeremy Dobbins

*Today we begin season two of Veterans Voices' here on WYSO: stories about local military veterans produced by student veterans at Wright State University. Many of the veterans we'll hear from in the next two months joined the military in the days after September 11, 2001. Now, many of them are returning to civilian life. For some it's an easy transition. For others, it's far more complicated. Marine Corp veteran and Wright State student, Jeremy Dobbins was raised in Springfield. He tells us the story of a fellow Marine's call to service.*

Sam Santos and I met in the Marine Corp while serving as infantry riflemen. Sam had been on three combat deployments, and I was preparing for my first. Like many veterans of our generation, Sam and I were both adolescents on September 11, 2001. One year later, Sam's high school choir performed at Ground Zero.

"I'll never forget the flagpole that was on top of the tower was laying in this huge pile and it was canted down on a lean," Sam says. "And when I saw the flag half way down like that, it really angered me. I was like my country's head is hanging down."

I was in seventh grade on 9-11, and I was in history class, and the teacher and everybody turned on the TVs and said, "Kids, this is a big deal." We had to write an assignment that was how this was going to affect your life. I remember thinking: I'm going into the military.

"I asked all my friends, 'Who's coming with me? Who wants to join?' I was the only one." says Sam. "They all told me they were going to college. I said, 'Alright then, I'm going to the war. They're going to pay for what they've done.'"

My high school friends were not interested in joining the military either, and like Sam, I joined against my parents' will. The decision to join can be lonely, but by the time I got to boot camp I realized I wasn't alone.

My Battalion Commander asked, "Who here enlisted because of September the 11th?" Almost everybody's hand went up. People said, "I came to fight. I'm here to kill people." It's funny because looking back, no one in that squad had any idea what was about to happen. People said, "This sucks! This is awful!" and "But this is what you wanted. This is combat. This is what it is."

"In combat, Marines get hurt," says Sam.

Young Marines think they are invulnerable, I used to feel this way but then I went to combat where that ideal quickly died.

"Once you get that first experience at the war, it's a life changer," says Sam. "You and I sacrificed our youth. We will never get that back. We sacrificed our youth. I don't know what it's like to be nineteen years old and not know how to use a machine gun. In my mind I was proud of doing that. I wanted to do that for my country. I don't feel like I stepped up. I feel like I did what I had to do."

Like Sam, I feel I made the right decision to become a Marine. Today I feel a mix of pride, insignificance, heavy heartedness, anger, and privilege. Sam and I talk about these things when we get together, and I'm lucky to have friends like Sam to help sort out our unique experiences.

*Veterans Voices is produced in collaboration with the [Veteran and Military Center at Wright State University](#). Funding for this series comes from Ohio Humanities.*

Photo:

caption: Sam Santos

credit: Jeremy Dobbins