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Reflecting on Military Service Without Combat

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Photo Caption: Cody Stevens and Cole Hamilton
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Today on Veterans Voice, we hear from two veterans who never saw combat. Even though that's the case for most men and women who serve in the military, Cody Stevens of Xenia and Cole Hamilton of Dayton have mixed feelings about not getting to deploy. Cole is an Army veteran and Cody is a Marine Corps veteran. Both are Wright State students.

Transcript:

Cody Stevens (CS): I was just up one night, real late. I was watching military documentaries, and stuff like that. I watched one called Making Marines, and I was like, I need to change my life. Because I was just being fat and lazy, and I was like, well, if I want to change my life, the Marines will do it.

Cole Hamilton (CH): When I was seventeen, my dad gave me three options: go to school, learn a trade, or join the military. What he really meant was go to school. So I joined the military the next week and he had to sign for me, and he hated it. I really joined solely to travel and see exciting things, and I stayed in North Carolina for three years. It's kind of ironic.

CS: Yeah, I got to travel around the country a little bit. I mean, we did some training in West Virginia. They sent me to a Basic Investigator course in San Diego, and San Diego is beautiful city so it was nice going there, but I really wanted to get out of the country. And after seven years, I'm a little frustrated I didn't get to get out of the country at all. So how do you feel about that?

CH: The most irritating part is anytime somebody asked where I went, or what I did in the military, I can tell them Airborne School, Ranger School, this and that, but what they hear, or to me what I think they hear, is that I never left the United States. And I don't know if in my head I lose, or there's lost respect there. It's something that, I don't know, hits me really hard, being a veteran and not ever really going anywhere. It's just really irritating and hard to get past. Because that's going to stick with me for the rest of my life like, not sharing that experience with the people I served with.

CS: Yeah, I mean I understand that because I really wanted to deploy at least once. What do you think when people say people say, “Thank you for your service”? How do you feel about that?
CH: It's a weird little moment my head because I'm like, yeah no problem, I don't want to be thanked. And then there's a part of me thinking like there's some guys out there that I would thank for their service. Because I hold a lot of people above myself when it comes to seeing combat. And when I'm getting the same thanks they are, it stings a little, or, I don't know, it's an odd feeling.

CS: I mean, I guess we can be thankful that we don't have to bear that.

CH: It's very bittersweet, not having to go. And also for lots of guys that did go and deploy, that's not something to complain about in front of them. I've talked to lots of people who wish they didn't go and see the things they did see, and I'm here complaining about not going and experiencing what they did when it's something terrible they're going to have to live with. So it's really difficult thing. It's like an internal battle.

CS: Yeah.

CH: Happy..., not...

CS: Yeah, I get that.

CH: It's hard to be proud of things. You can't really talk about it without, you know… There's always somebody there who did something more, or is a tier above you, and you kind of got to keep it to yourself, and it sort of sucks sometimes.

CS: There were times I got down. There were times I was proud. Every Toys For Tots season. If that's just standing in the mall, collecting toys and money, giving back to our community. I was always proud of that. I love helping them out. I feel like if we're not deploying my unit, then this is what we're doing here.

CH: There's really nothing I regret. It was just sort of luck of the draw when it comes to getting deployed. It's probably the best decision I made as an adult, well actually as a teenager. It set me up for success. I'm wrapping up a Bachelors degree now and haven't paid a dime for college. I made great friends, lots of memories, and I can say I've served my country.

CS: I think that mission was accomplished. I did change my life. I'm happy with who I am, where I am, and where my life is going.

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