

Rattler Headed for Combat Zone

Contributed by Chantell Black -- Black College Wire
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"I'm on my way to support the War on Terror...again."

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On Dec. 1, President Barack Obama announced a 30,000-troop surge in Afghanistan beginning next year. On Jan. 1, I will be boarding a plane to the combat zone. Our president doesn't waste any time.

While many graduates will be celebrating their graduation weekend attending parties or going out with friends and family, my Saturday morning following commencement consists of a 15-hour drive to Fort Dix, N.J., to prepare for deployment. I'm on my way to support the War on Terror...again. I previously deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 while stationed in Germany. I would also like to credit my illustrious university for preparing me for this year long "vacation" in the sands. I returned to the States from my deployment and officially became a Rattler six months after in fall 2006 after meeting a FAMU student in Afghanistan and she recommended the school to me. My college experience has been surrounded by my combat experience. But I'm thankful.

When I first deployed at 20, I entered "the unknown" feeling lost, confused and upset at my decision to join the Army. But that very deployment helped me find my way to mental and spiritual clarity and humbleness.

I interacted with the Afghan people daily and witnessed their struggles and their will to be a nation to stand on its own without the help of the U.S. I believe that President Obama has the service members' interest at heart, but I also understand that as Commander-in-Chief there are decisions that he will make and we must execute, without question. That's our jobs as soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines...and we do it with pride. (

I would love to stay in the U.S. and pursue my career as an entertainment reporter, but as a soldier I must defer my plans and serve my country first. Luckily, I am also a broadcast journalist in the U.S. Army Reserves, and will be able to continue my passion for journalism...just from a different perspective. Besides, it's kind of comforting to know in today's economy I'll be on a full-time salary two days after graduation.

I believe as a female minority my presence is vital in today's military. After my return from Afghanistan, I plan to become an officer and climb the ranks and be an influence in my local community as well as the U.S. Army. Many question my reasons for this decision and my answer is simple: I want to serve. There aren't many high-ranking officials that look like me, so I aspire to be one of the first few.

I will never abandon my dreams as a civilian reporter, which is why I chose to switch to the Army Reserves upon attending to FAMU. I like the idea of living a positive double life and fulfilling two goals simultaneously.

I came to this school unfamiliar to the southern, HBCU experience and boy was I in for a treat! But I have no regrets. I held executive board positions in the North Eastern Vibe Organization and the FAMU Association of Black Journalists; I joined FACES Modeling Troupe, was inducted in three honor societies as well as contribute to all areas of student media. From print, to radio, to television, I absorbed it and gained from it all.

I take to my military counterparts overseas my college education, along with my soldiering skills. Most importantly I will take my Rattler pride all over the world to show everyone that we are an unstoppable force and will continue to rise to the top wherever we go. Florida A&M University, thank you. I will not let you down.

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Chantell Black writes for The Famuan, the Florida A&M University student newspaper, which originally published this article.

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