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# Law Admission Essay

At eighteen, I finished high school and promptly enlisted in the U.S. Army as a mechanic. I was born and raised in Washington Heights, a mostly Dominican community in Manhattan. While the rest of my class graduating from the High School of Fashion Industries, I was in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, crawling through the mud. I have served my country with honor and diligence in a variety of positions.

A few months after enlisting, I arrived at my unit in Schweinfurt, Germany and quickly learned that deployment was imminent. Nine months later, I carried over forty pounds of gear on my 110-pound frame as I awaited my flight into Kuwait, where my unit would train for three weeks before continuing on to Iraq. Upon arrival, I was assigned to work as a guard for the detention facility. As the sole female guard on my shift, I mostly did administrative work for the prison, working twelve hour shifts.

One afternoon, my first sergeant informed me that a female would be facing a court martial trial; as I was the only female in the platoon who was trained, I would be handcuffing and guarding the soldier throughout the process. To my horror, that soldier was one of my best friends, XXX, a small, hardworking Mexican woman with long red hair. She was facing a court martial for pulling her weapon on a fellow soldier who had attacked her while yelling racial slurs. The attacker was over six feet tall, Caucasian with blue eyes. I assumed that it had been self-defense and that she would be exonerated.

My palms were sweaty as I walked to the court martial because I already knew the findings and the sentence. The assailant had admitted to have attacked her due to a misunderstanding. He stated that if he had reached her before she pulled her weapon on him, he was uncertain about what damage he would have done to her. XXX was sentenced to prison time and her rank of specialist was removed from her chest. I placed the cuffs on her wrists with the certainty that her sentence was unjust. When I asked her to separate her legs so I could place the ankle cuffs, she looked down at me and whispered, "Not so hard, Ellie." I felt her tears on my forehead as I looked up at her and my own tears began to pour down in disbelief. I still remember the desert sun beating on my face as I led my best friend into the van for lock up.

I had begun taking college courses in order to compete in military boards but discovered a passion for history and law. During my deployment in Afghanistan in 2010, I earned my associate's degree through a distance learning program offered by the University of Maryland. I would walk into class, place my rifle on the weapons rack and my gear under my seat, and forget that I was in a combat zone. I earned my bachelor's from Saint Leo University while I was stationed in Fort Eustis, Virginia. The introduction to law course that I took there profoundly shaped my perspective and career goals.

I am a proud American soldier but also a student, a mother, a daughter, and a sister. I believe that I should have the same equal rights as any other person. While the Uniform Code of Military Justice has due process, it is far from perfect. I want to serve my country in a different way by helping America's heroes find justice. I plan to be there for all of the servicemen and servicewomen who have not received a fair sentence. Rather than mourning the mistakes that have been made, I want to contribute to positive change by becoming a lawyer.

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