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Silence Breaks

Silence rings throughout the wrestling arena. There is one sound. One sound that is created by all four members on my Color Guard Team -- the sound of our footsteps as we march in perfect unison to the center of the mat. The silence reminds me of a different silence I experienced at the beginning of my time in JROTC. During my first day of JROTC, I found myself surrounded by a large, intimidating upperclassmen. They all looked around at the first-years like we were some course of fresh meat. They whispered and asked each other which of us they thought would break and drop out by second semester. They laughed about the first-years they thought would not survive the first day of PT. Hearing their intimidating and taunting voices made me afraid to hear my own, so then I was silent.

Soon we began to receive instructions, and so I followed them without question. I was told to come to drill and color guard. At drill, I met our Group Commander, who was unlike the other upperclassmen. He taught us first years many valuable lessons beyond how to drill. I could tell that our unit was very important to him. He taught me much more than any of the other upperclassmen ever did, and I wished they had been more like him. He taught me how to communicate well with others, and that progress could never be made unless 100% effort was put forth. He made me realize that the first-years were quite important to the unit because we were the future of it. After meeting him, I wasn't so afraid to speak anymore. I gained a lot of confidence. I decided I wanted to be Group Commander when I was a fourth-year, so I could be sure to affect those first-years in the same way that he affected me.

Now that I had a goal to work towards, I began to embrace the Air Force Core Values – Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do -- just as our Group Commander did. I read the Cadet Guide cover to cover. I got involved in more JROTC activities, like model rocketry and military ball. Through all of these activities, I learned and built up my leadership skills. I learned important skills that I could use for the rest of my life. I learned that it was important to have respect for everyone. Since my first year in JROTC, I took steps to develop myself into a better citizen for America. First, I watched how the Team Commanders ran practices. I took note of what they said and then did that the teams responded well to. The next year I was put into the leadership position of Flight Commander and Color Guard Commander. I took what I had learned to develop my own leadership skills and style. My Color Guard Team soon became the preferable presenters within the broader community. We were reliable and always available. Which is where we are now.

Because of JROTC, when I enter the adult world I will already have gained many leadership skills that my colleagues will just be beginning to learn. I know how to communicate well with others, how to make a plan, how to conduct a meeting, and much more. I will already have a strong character because of my experiences in JROTC. The Air Force Core Values shaped who I have become, and they shape my future. They make me a better person and a better citizen. I will not begin my journey on becoming a better citizen for America when I start my first career, because I became a better citizen after I started JROTC.

We finally reach the center of the mat at the state-wide wrestling invitational tournament. I break the silence and call my team to a halt. Then I command them to present arms -- 1... 2... 3... (in silence), all presenting in perfect unison.