Staff Sgt. Kept Up His Courses While Deployed

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Staff Sgt Chad F. McCoy, R.N., of Plant City, attends Keiser University and is earning a bachelor of science degree in nursing, though for much of that time he has been stationed in Qatar.

LAKELand | If Staff Sgt. Chad McCoy ever felt overwhelmed at being deployed to Qatar while taking a full load of courses at Keiser University, he hasn't let on.

The 30-year-old has served more than 12 years in the Army National Guard, but a recent 10-month stint in Qatar was challenging in a unique way for the student soldier. When time allowed, he went online to address his course work, and he managed to maintain a 3.67 GPA as he worked toward his bachelor of science degree in nursing.

He talked about his experience while hanging out at Keiser's Lakeland campus recently.

The Cypress Lakes Veterans Association awarded a $500 scholarship to McCoy recently for his hard work. And Keiser has reserved bragging rights about the student.

"Some may find the hours required to get through a nursing program grueling, but after having commanded 12 to 24 men while deployed, and putting in 12-hour days, seven days a week, he has been up to the challenge of earning his bachelor's," said spokeswoman Kimberly Dale. "During his time overseas, he still completed his assignments for school, regardless of the circumstances."
The father of a 6-year-old boy, he also stayed in touch with his son and read books to him via Skype. He would buy two copies of books they wanted to read together, and send one to his son and keep one to read himself. The system worked pretty well.

Rebecca McDonnell, Lakeland campus president, said the school takes pride in its support of veterans.

"With 20 percent of Keiser's student population being made up of veterans, it is vital that we support them when they are deployed and called to do their patriotic duty," she said. "Chad is a shining example of this segment of our student body, and we are so proud to have him enrolled in our nursing program."

McCoy is a member of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Field Artillery Regiment in Plant City. He said he made a decision to enlist after 9/11.

"I was thinking about enlisting in high school, but after watching 9/11 happen on the TV at school, I felt an overwhelming urge to do it then," he said.

Upon returning from Qatar, he was able to land a job at South Bay Hospital's emergency room in Sun City Center.

He is pursuing his bachelor's degree in nursing now. He would like to keep going with his education, he said, and perhaps become a registered nurse practitioner or anesthetist someday.

He said he's appreciative of his recent endowment from the veterans association.

"The scholarship was awesome, and it was so nice meeting the group that gave it to me," he said. "They were very friendly, and enjoyed hearing my story and telling me some of theirs. It was an amazing group of people."

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