

KAUS

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Choosing the right path

Sergeant turns life around after choosing to join Corps

Some people join the military for college money, others may find themselves joining for the thrill of adventure or travel, but for some, a deeper calling is out there. Those are the people who need to get themselves out of a situation that could eventually take them down a dark path that offers a limited future.

Sergeant Jeffery L. Kaus, chief, Combat Camera, Headquarters Battalion, Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, said he found himself following the wrong path during his adolescence, and then found his way to a better life when he joined the Marine Corps – a path he said he plans to continue down for as long as he can.

Growing up in Denver, during junior high school and later moving to Fort Laramie, Wyo., Kaus lived with his mother. He said at that time he didn't have a real sense of direction.

He said during high school, he ended up spiraling downward in a direction he didn't want to go.

“I found myself with a kid and a girlfriend during my senior year of high school, and two dead-end jobs,” said the 26-year-old. “I dropped out the last semester of my senior year, because I had to put food on the table and didn’t have time to work that much and go to school.”

As time went on Kaus said things did not progress for the better.

“I was getting into a lot of fights and going down a really bad path,” said Kaus. “I had hit a real rut in my life, and if I hadn’t done something drastic, I don’t know where I would be now. I had to venture forth and do something productive with my life.”

As luck would have it, Kaus said he got a knock on the door one day by an Army recruiter who had accidentally come to the wrong house.

“Even though it was an accident, I wanted to hear what he had to say and decided to sleep on it,” said Kaus. “When I was thinking that night, I found myself staring at a Marines bumper sticker that I had since I was like eight years old. I thought to myself, ‘If you’re going to take this leap, you may as well go all out,’ and that’s what lead me to the Marine recruiter’s office.”

Kaus spoke with the recruiter who led him to an alternative school that would allow him to get his high school diploma so he could enlist.

Knowing there were no other options and wanting to do this for himself and his family, Kaus said he attended Triumph High School in Cheyenne, Wyo., with a determination never before seen at that school.

“The school is self-paced. I told myself I would complete the entire syllabus in three weeks; that’s exactly what I did,” said Kaus. “I waited in the morning outside the

school before it opened, just so I could be the first one in, and they would have to force me out at night.

“After I completed the syllabus, went to boot camp, my (Military Occupational Specialty) school and got to Quantico (Va.), I still hadn’t yet received my diploma, because the class I was going through had not completed the syllabus yet. They couldn’t believe I did it that fast.”

Although he joined the Corps and become a graphic artist and ended up in Quantico, Va., Kaus said his troubles were not entirely over.

“My wife didn’t like the fact that I joined the military, and we had a lot of problems,” said Kaus. “Neither one of us had been on the East Coast before, so we had no friends or family to talk to. It took a real toll on us, and we actually ended up getting divorced.”

At the end of his first enlistment, Kaus said he planned on leaving the Corps but had two children to provide for and decided he would do another enlistment.

“I didn’t want to end up in Six Flags, doing caricatures for people,” said Kaus. “I knew I had to re-up (reenlist) and that was it. That’s when I ended up in K-Bay in November 2003.”

Until that time, Kaus said he didn’t have the opportunity to deploy. He finally got his chance when he deployed from Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, with 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

“That’s another reason I initially reenlisted,” said Kaus. “I fought for that deployment. I spent my entire first enlistment in a garrison unit and it drove me crazy for four years.”

He said the deployment gave him a different outlook on a lot of things.

“When you see how the “grunt” units are in garrison, and you see how the infantry and (support) relationship are not too familiar with each other, it’s because we don’t deal with each other on a regular basis,” said Kaus. “But when you go in theater together and you spit dirt with them, it changes the way you view each other. There’s a higher respect on both sides. I know, I have a higher respect for them.”

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Kaus said that when he went to Afghanistan, a third-world country where it was 35 to 40 degrees, and saw a barefoot, 3-year-old child carrying a pile of sticks, he thought about his 8-year-old at home who he said complains about taking out the trash.

“It’s unbelievable how much we all take things for granted,” he said.

Kaus said he would like to deploy again, but he just recently transferred to recruiting duty and will leave K-Bay Oct. 31.

“If it wasn’t for my recruiting duty, I’d be pushing right now to go to Iraq with 1/3.”

“My family is very supportive now of my choices. I have remarried my wife, and things are really going well for me,” said Kaus. “I’m just going to take one enlistment at a time, but I intend, as of now, to go all the way and make the Marine Corps a career.”

Kaus said he is thankful to the Corps for everything it has done for him so far.

“If it wasn’t for the Marine Corps, I’m sure I’d be flipping burgers right now, in what I like to call a dead-end, stagnant mosquito pool,” said Kaus. “I love the Marines. It’s guaranteed to take you places and let you see new faces every three years.

“If I didn’t have this, I would get bored. So right now, this is the perfect place for me.”