

REAL HEROES > SFC ROBERT GROFF > BIOGRAPHY



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Sergeant First Class Robert Groff returned to the kill zone when under attack to evacuate American civilian drivers and his Soldiers...

"SMALL TOWN BOY"

Sergeant First Class Robert Groff grew up in Bartonville, Illinois, a place so small that nearby Peoria was considered the "big city." A true small-town boy, Groff attended school at the old brownstone elementary on Adams Street. For fun, he and his friends would spend hours in the nearby woods playing "Army." They talked and dreamed about someday joining the Army and jumping out of airplanes.

"WE WORKED HARD FOR WHAT WE HAD"

SFC Groff's family was close-knit and supportive.

My two sisters and I, we didn't have much, but what we did have my mom and stepdad worked very hard for.

Two of Robert's uncles had served in the Army, one in Turkey and the other in Vietnam, but Robert never heard them talk about it. In high school, the idea of joining the Army began to interest him. Two of his cousins had enlisted and were stationed in Germany. Home on leave, they would tell Robert colorful stories of their travels through Europe. And when his best friend entered the Army and began jumping out of airplanes, Robert decided to talk to an Army Recruiter. He also enrolled at the local community college, knowing that his mother, Sandra, hoped for him to earn a degree. But it didn't take long before he realized that college wasn't his calling - at least not yet. The idea of serving in the Army attracted young Groff even more. He was now 18 years old and soon made up his mind.

I signed up for four years. I knew I could go to college afterward and the Army would pay for it. My mom supported me, like she always did. And she made sure I held up my end of the bargain and one day attended college.

"THE FIRST GULF WAR"

After he completed Basic Training, Groff's first duty station was in Germany as part of the 144th Ordnance Company. Like his cousins, Groff was seeing the world and he couldn't have been happier. In late 1990, Groff learned his unit was deploying as part of Operation Desert Storm. He would soon get to see an even more unique part of the world.

As a young private, Groff was nervous on the flight to the Middle East. But any fear he had soon gave way to the challenge and the heat. Attached to a unit at a rear

ammunition supply point in Saudi Arabia, Groff and his fellow Soldiers ensured that ammunition was sent north to the troops who needed it. The war seemed distant and was over quickly. To Private Groff, the First Gulf War felt like an extended training mission.

THE RESERVIST

Following the end of Operation Desert Storm, Private Groff returned to Germany with his unit. For a year he lived the Army life he'd only heard about from his cousins. He worked hard but on his time off he traveled throughout Germany and made trips to France and Spain. Groff spent the last two years of his commitment stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. When his enlistment was up, Groff wanted to go to college but didn't want to leave the Army. He weighed his options and decided to join the Army Reserves.



At first it was difficult to go from active duty to reserve duty. But I knew this would be the best way to get my education- and to get my education paid for- and still be part of the Army.

Groff had the best of both worlds. The Army paid for him to go to college while he worked in the civilian sector. Being committed to the Army one weekend a month and an additional two weeks in the summer was a good deal. And he got paid. But more importantly, he remained a part of the Army he had grown to love.

Back home in Bartonville, Groff enrolled again at the local community college and started hanging out at his mother's beauty salon. Sandra had recently hired a young beautician who caught his eye-Karrie, a beautiful young woman from neighboring Kickapoo. Robert knew that he would one day marry her. **Continued Page 14**



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