

OUR MAIN SPEAKER TODAY IS U.S ARMY 1ST LT. AARON FRANKOVIC, WHO IS ON ACTIVE DUTY WITH THE 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION.

AARON IS THE SON OF MARK AND SHEILA FRANKOVIC, AND GREW UP ON FOREST PLACE ONLY A FEW HUNDRED YARDS FROM WHERE WE ARE STANDING. HE WAS ONE OF THOSE MEN AND WOMEN WHO RESPONDED TO THE CALL OF DUTY AFTER THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACK ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

AARON WAS BEGINNING HIS FRESHMAN YEAR AT MIAMI UNIVERSITY WHEN THE ATTACK TOOK PLACE. ALTHOUGH HE HAD BEEN THINKING OF BECOMING A MARINE AFTER GRADUATION, AN ARMY RECRUITER CONVINCED HIM TO ENLIST IMMEDIATELY AND JOIN THE AIRBORNE INFANTRY.

UNFORTUNATELY, SIX WEEKS INTO TRAINING, AARON SUFFERED INJURIES TO BOTH HIS SHOULDERS DURING A PARACHUTE DROP. THIS NEXT PART YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE. WHILE HE WAS RECUPERATING, THE ARMY LOST HIS FILE, AND AARON LANGUISHED FOR NEARLY TWO MONTHS WITHOUT ORDERS. GIVEN HIS INJURIES AND THE INTERRUPTION IN HIS TRAINING, AARON WAS MEDICALLY CHAPTERED OUT BY THE ARMY.

ALTHOUGH MANY OF YOU IN THE AUDIENCE VOLUNTEERED FOR MILITARY SERVICE, AARON IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW WHO VOLUNTEERED TWICE. HE RETURNED TO MIAMI AFTER HIS DISCHARGE, AND WHEN HE GRADUATED, AARON ENLISTED IN THE ARMY FOR THE SECOND TIME.

THIS TIME AARON SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED BOTH AIRBORNE INFANTRY SCHOOL AND OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL AND WAS COMMISSIONED A 2ND LIEUTENANT. AARON HAS NOW SERVED NEARLY FOUR YEARS IN THE ARMY AND WILL SOON BE PROMOTED CAPTAIN. IN MARCH HIS UNIT COMPLETED A 9 MONTH TOUR IN AFGHANISTAN.

WHEN I SPOKE WITH AARON ABOUT BEING A SPEAKER TODAY, AARON TOLD ME THAT THE ARMY MADE NO PARACHUTE DROPS IN AFGHANISTAN ....NONE. I ASKED HIM, THEN, WHAT DID THE ARMY DO WITH AIRBORNE TROOPS. THE ARMY, HE SAID, PUT AIRBORNE IN REGIONS WHERE THEY WANTED TO BE .... EXTRA ....AGGRESSIVE.

DESPITE BEING GROUNDED DURING HIS AFGHAN TOUR, LT. FRANKOVIC HAS COMPLETED 19 PARACHUTE DROPS, AND THIS TIME TOMORROW HE WILL BE BACK ON DUTY AT FT. BRAGG, N.C.

LT. FRANKOVIC WILL SPEAK TO US ABOUT HIS MEMORIES OF MEN IN HIS ARMY UNIT WHO WERE ALIVE LAST MEMORIAL DAY, BUT WHO DID NOT RETURN FROM AFGHANISTAN TO BE WITH THEIR FAMILIES TODAY.

LT. FRANKOVIC: