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Army Values inspire Baghdad girl to become Soldier

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. – A camouflage pencil and American Soldiers displaying Army Values led an Iraqi girl down the path to joining the U.S. Army.

Pvt. Mari Hamid, Company C, 58th Transportation Battalion, Advanced Individual Training Soldier, is at Fort Leonard Wood to become a transportation specialist.

She and her Family moved to the United States just two months shy of her 15th birthday, with the help of the United Nations.

Hamid grew up to the sound of gunfire and the presence of the American military.

“I was happy that there was military there. I was obsessed with the (American) military since the beginning,” Hamid said. “But it was horrible at the same time, all the fire-fights. It was bad, 24-7.”

Hamid said her first contact with American Soldiers happened when she was in grade school.

“When I was in sixth grade, we had Soldiers come into my school. They handed out camo pencils that weren’t even very good,” Hamid laughed. “I still have that pencil, and it’s been 10 years now. I still carry my pencil with me. It’s broken in half, but I still keep it.

“It reminds me of those Soldiers, and especially that one Soldier who I still remember who opened the boxes (of pencils). They left their Families. They went through the heat, got shot at, and still had that respect. That’s one of our Army Values,” Hamid said.

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It was the demonstration of that Army Value that left such a lasting impression on Hamid.

“They (American Soldiers) treated people the way they should be treated,” Hamid said. “They treated us not as ‘oh, they are all terrorists,’ because we’re not. They treated us with respect, and that went a very long way.”

Hamid said she often thinks of that Soldier who opened the boxes of pencils.

“I don’t know if that Soldier ever thought that one of those hundreds of kids would carry that pencil everywhere and be at Fort Leonard Wood some day,” Hamid said. “They probably thought I would lose it,” she added with a smile.

Against her mother’s wishes, Hamid signed her enlistment contract last September and completed basic training here on Fort Leonard Wood with Company A, 1st Infantry Battalion, 48th Regiment.

“My mom was furious. She was really angry, and didn’t even come to my swearing in,” Hamid said. “She said ‘I got you out of war, I don’t want you back in there.’ She got over it and, when I went to basic, she would send me letters saying that she was proud of me.”

Hamid said basic training was tormenting but a healing process.

“Basic made me an emotional and physical wreck,” Hamid said.

“Shooting was very hard for me, because the noises brought back bad memories,” she said. “I have combat stress problems – the minute I heard the first shot, I froze and started crying. I just thought of everything back home, the fear of losing my mom.”

She added, “Every time I heard shooting, I was back in Iraq reliving memories that they (insurgents) were going to come into our house and kill us. They would take over houses for fighting.”

Besides the gunfire, the 20-year-old explained basic training became tougher when she got injured.

“I couldn’t run; I couldn’t do anything – I was almost about to quit,” Hamid recalled.

She credits her drill sergeant, Staff Sgt. Nicholas Thompson, for not letting her give up and graduate.

“There’s the Soldier who gave me the pencil and then there’s Drill Sgt. Thompson – I owe my whole military life to them,” Hamid said.

Hamid has some words of advice for foreign nationals wishing to follow her path.

“When you raise your hand and swear-in, you have to let your country go,” Hamid said. “Once you enlist, this becomes your country, otherwise take off the flag. Otherwise, you’re not fit enough to put it on your right arm,” Hamid said.

“I will carry red, white and blue to the grave. This is my country now. My mom always says that home is where you are safe and comfortable, not where you are born. This is home for me,” she added.

Hamid also has a message for her fellow brothers and sisters in uniform.

“The military is way bigger than anyone,” Hamid said. “It’s bigger than me; it’s bigger than anyone’s ego. You need heart – you need the heart to be here. If you have little-heart syndrome, you shouldn’t be a Soldier.”

Hamid is a member of the Massachusetts Army National Guard and will return to her home state to attend college with the goal to become an emergency room doctor.

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For more information, contact the Fort Leonard Wood Public Affairs Office at 573-563-4145.

Encl. (1) Photo

Photo outline: Pvt. Mari Hamid holds the pencil she received when American Soldiers visited her grade school in Iraq. It was those Soldiers and their display of Army Values that inspired Hamid to become a Soldier.

About Fort Leonard Wood

Fort Leonard Wood is a thriving and prosperous installation that has evolved from a small basic training post 70 years ago to a premier Army Center of Excellence that trains more than 80,000 military and civilians each year.

Home to the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood now trains and educates service members and develops doctrine and capabilities for the Training and Doctrine Command’s U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, U.S. Army Engineer School, and U.S. Army Military Police School, three gender integrated Initial Military Training brigades, one of only five reception stations in the Army, and the Army’s largest Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

Over the past several years, Fort Leonard Wood has received numerous additional responsibilities to include supporting the 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, a large Forces Command unit that is responsible for all deployable capabilities at Fort Leonard Wood. A colonel-commanded Marine Corps Detachment and an Air Force Detachment, which are both the largest on any Army installation, are located on Fort Leonard Wood; a large Navy Seabee Detachment and elements of the Coast Guard train here as well.
