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Military's been her goal since 9/11

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

FORT MITCHELL - Call her a member of the 9/11 generation.

"On September 11th, 2001, I sat as an 11-year-old and watched our country be attacked," said Leandra Arnold, Beechwood High School Class of 2008.

"On that day I decided I wanted to serve in the military. I looked into my different options and quickly found West Point. I knew the leadership, the commitment, the devotion, the hard work, the incredible education, the physical training, and the military training would all be superb."

"It really was the perfect choice for me, and I've been pushing toward that goal since age 11."

In March, Arnold was accepted by the U.S. Military Academy, better known as West Point. On June 30, she reports for cadet basic training. This summer military training before school starts is known as "Beast Barracks" to first-year students for its grueling training. On Aug. 23, Arnold will become a Plebe (freshman student).

Arnold says West Point will do many things for her.

"West Point will make me both mentally and physically strong, which is an awesome benefit," she said. "But most importantly, from West Point I know I will come away with the ability to lead the soldiers of our country. I will become an even more confident person, and I know I will walk away with an education different from my high school classmates."

Pursuing a goal single-handedly may seem strange - unless you know Arnold.

"My mom and dad always tell me what a stubborn child I was," she said. "I never wanted help tying my shoes; I wanted to figure it out for myself. I guess this has its downfalls, but all in all it has been very helpful. I have been stubborn and determined to do well throughout all of my time as a student."

The grades to get into West Point came from her parents and soon-to-be alma mater.

"Being raised in a home where education is made a priority was very essential. But, I can't deny that being at Beechwood has also been a contributing factor. I learned so much at Beechwood, and all my teachers have always been confident in me and given me help whenever needed."

Arnold said her teachers and classmates have been very supportive. Although they do give her some good-natured ribbing. She's been called "maggot" more than once (a term for West Point freshmen). She's also been told to "drop and give me fifty."

"Some people have begun calling me 'boots' because of my combat boots I had to purchase," she said.

"And others joke about saluting me in the hallways. Even my teachers enjoy giving me a hard time. But, I know when it comes down to it, they are all just joking with me. Everyone is really proud of me and quite excited. So I guess they can't wait to see me succeed."

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