

Like Father, Like Son
By Kathi Matthews-Risley

Men and women join the military for many reasons: some join to find a place to belong; others join to feel connected to something bigger than themselves; and many join out of a sense of duty to serve their country.

On a recent Sunday this spring, I sat down with Dave and Lucas Lohr, father and son, long-time members of St. John's, and asked them a few questions about their military experience.

Lucas is 26 years old, a 2003 graduate of Sauk Prairie High School and a 2009 graduate of UW-Stout. He is a member of the 32nd Combat Engineers, a National Guard unit out of Onalaska, Wisconsin. He joined the military right out of high school, and has been deployed twice -- once to Kuwait and the second time to Iraq. There's talk of deploying his unit once more in the spring of 2012. This time to Afghanistan.

Lucas holds the rank of E6. During his time in Iraq in 2005-2006 his unit was stationed 40 miles north of Baghdad. They were responsible for internal/external security. It was dangerous and stressful work. He was in charge of 24 soldiers who guarded 450 detainees. He became somewhat of a father figure to many of his troops who were younger than he was. And he was just 21.

I asked Lucas what it was like being a troop leader at such a young age in such a dangerous place. He credited his training for helping him keep cool under fire. I commented that it always amazes me how soldiers risk their own lives to protect one of their own. Lucas responded in no uncertain terms that "you don't think twice about putting your life on the line. The people you serve with are your best friends and you would do anything for them".

Lucas is now in Afghanistan serving in Kandahar Province.



Dave enlisted during the Vietnam war at the age of 18. He enlisted in the Air Force and fully expected to go to Vietnam -- many of his friends were sent there. In fact, after the Pueblo was sunk in 1967, everyone in that age group was sent to Vietnam. Dave had a different mission.

After his basic training and active training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, Dave learned he would be stationed in England for a three year deployment. He was in a military police unit which guarded an air field. He traveled extensively during his time in Europe.

After his deployment, Dave came back to McCord Air Force base in the state of Washington. He stayed in Washington, not seeing his family for 2 1/2 years. When he did come back to Sauk Prairie it seemed strange to be home after seeing the world.

I started the interview by asking Lucas if he joined the military because of his father's service. He said he grew up hearing about his dad's travels across Europe during his enlistment and that hearing these stories may have influenced him somewhat.

Father and son veterans. Two men compelled to enlist in the military during two of the most turbulent times in this country's recent history: Vietnam and the aftermath of 9/11.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans.