

Prepared Statement of Sergeant Christopher J. Pantzke, USA, Retired

“The 90/10 Rule: Improving Educational Outcomes for our Military and Veterans”

July 23, 2013

Greetings to the committee, panel, members of the media,

Let me start by telling you a little bit about myself. My name is Christopher James Pantzke, SGT, US Army, RET. I am a 100% disable Iraq Combat Veteran. I hail from Minnesota but live in Prince George, VA., where myself, wife and son currently live. I will try to keep my story short as possible due to my time frame with the committee. I will start when I re-enlisted with the US Army.

My family and I were living in Fergus Falls assisting my mother and step-father with everyday life as they were aging. In October of 2002 I decide to enlist with the MN Army National Guard. During my time in the MN Nation Guard I was promoted from Private First Class to Specialist due fact that I had strived for excellence in the tasks that assignments that were put to me. During this time my step-father passed and my mother went into an assisted living home. My wife and I know that my mother would be well taken care of. So, I decided that I needed to provide a better life for my wife and son. I went and spoke with my chain of command and told them I wanted to re-enlist into the US Army. I was granted permission on one condition that I would keep my rank of Specialist (E-4). When I enlisted into the US Army I given three choices of duty stations, I chose Ft. Lee. I was notified that I would have to wait six months due to fact that my receiving unit was deployed at the time. In April of 2004 I signed in at Ft. Lee.

When we arrived at Ft. Lee, VA, I was assigned to the 109th Quartermasters Company, 240th Quartermaster Battalion, 49th Group. From 2004 to 2005 my squad leader, SGT Ivan Andrade saw leadership potential in me and started mentoring, training, and testing me to become a sergeant, a leader of soldiers. In late September of 2005 I was promoted to sergeant and five day later the 109th QM CO was deployed to Iraq.

The 109th QM CO was stationed at Al Asad Airbase were we became a transportation company, moving supplies, from I to class X supplies to various parts of Iraq. I was as assigned to several convoys during my deployment all but one went without a hitch. In late October early November of 2005 we set out on a convoy to Rawah Firebase to drop off a J lens (Video Camera). The following day we left on our way back to Al Asad Airbase about 3 p.m. in the afternoon my convoy was hit by VBIED (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device). The vehicle that I was traveling in was about 125 meters from the center of the blast. We stopped as we watched the explosive plume engulf one of our security vehicles, it completely disappeared. We both felt the concussion from the blast. My driver and I had sinking feeling that road had completely been destroyed, trapping the rest the convoy that was behind us, setting up for an ambush. I told my drive to go, go, go, push through, push through. As drove through the "kill zone" we saw bits and parts of the vehicle plus possible burnt body parts. I submitted a request for a Combat

Action Badge butts denied due to that the commanding Colonel had change the distance from the blast radius from 150 meters to 100 meters.

In December of 2005 I was assigned to COP North, a small outpost five miles south of the Syrian border to support the 414th CAV division. I was assigned to help resupply the outpost with food, water, and water. I became my XO's administrative assistant. I was place in charge of keeping track of the food, water, fuel supplies and supplies that were needed to operate the outpost. I had even created an excel tracking program to help in keeping track of our supplies, which I believe is still in use today. Shortly before our redeployment many of us received the Army Accommodation Medal for our participation in completing our mission objective. We also transported over 1.2 million gallons of fuel during our deployment.

In June of 2006 the 109th QM CO redeployed back to states. When we got back we were released for a thirty day leave. In which my family and I went back to Minnesota to visit my mother. After getting back from Minnesota we started our daily routine of preparedness. In the months to follow I started to get moody, depressed, and angry. My immediate leadership became concerned and was sent to the behavioral health center and Ft. Lee's Kenner Army Health Clinic. Where I was evaluated by Dr. Robert Brown and was recommended to be place in hospital for further evaluation. I was placed on medication to help with my mental health issues. When I was released three days later back to my company, it was recommended that I be place on thirty days of covalence leave as I started my mental health treatment.

I tried to complete my tasks and assigned duties as a sergeant, once again I found myself becoming angry, depressed, and suicidal. My treatment intensified as my doctors became concerned about well being. In 2008 I was place in the WTU at Ft. Lee so I could concentrate on healing and decide whether I wanted to continue on with my military career, or not. In November 2008 I was once again hospitalized for two weeks with anger, depression and suicidal tendencies. After being released from the hospital and sent back the WTU, I had decided that I was no longer a viable leader, I was damaged. So, after that decision Rene' (my wife) and I sat down discuss what I was going to do with my enormous free time that would be coming. I have always been interested in photography so, I search the web for online photography classes and schools. One school came up over and over, The Art Institute of Pittsburgh, which had an online photography degree program, a Bachelors Degree of Science in Photography.

The following day I called The Art Institute of Pittsburgh and spoke with a recruiter and told her that I was interested in the photography program that is offered. I told her first and foremost that I was Iraq Combat Veteran / Wounded Warrior, and that I had memory issues and PTSD. She responded that I would not be a problem that we will take care of you if you needed anything. I was satisfied with her response. She told me we need to get started on the admittance paper right away so I can be enrolled by start of school. She E-Mailed me the paperwork that I needed to be filled out plus other paperwork needed to complete the admittance process. She asked about if I any loans outstanding I told her that was not sure, and that I was very doubtful that I would be able to attend school. She told me to let her

handle that and not worry. As we were speaking I received and printed out the admittance paperwork, which I informed her that I received it. She told to fill out the paper work as quick as possible so she could submit the paperwork higher. We hung up and immediately started fill out the paperwork and got together the rest of the requested paperwork. That afternoon I E-Mailed my paperwork to my admittance officer. I also called her to let her that I returned my admittance paperwork. The next day less than forty-eight hours I received a call from the admittance officer telling that I "got in, you are good to go." I was very surprised that I was accepted into The Art Institute of Pittsburgh Online Division.

On March 19, 2009 I was medically retired and placed on TDRL status. Shortly after my release from the US Army we moved out of government housing to our current residence. I believe it to be July of 2009 I started my classes through the Art Institute of Pittsburg. I started my core classes such as Math, English, Art History, etc., the first quarter was a little shaky, I was starting to struggle a little bit. Shortly after I started my classes I receive (about 2 months) my VA back pay and some funds from AiO and I purchased my photographic equipment. I was very excited when I got my equipment. I then notified my Academic Advisor that I gotten my photographic equipment and was ready for some of my photography courses.

In 2010 Summer Quarter I became so depressed due to fact that I was struggling in all my classes that I failed to login into my classes for a week. In which I failed the two classes that I was in. AiO had believed that I withdraw me from school, which I had not. They also did not contact me to see what was going on. I understand that it is not the school's responsibility for my participation in my classes, but they should been concerned about me and what is going on. Just to give you an idea of my struggle with my classes. I had two classes every 9 ¹/₂ weeks, and I would have anywhere from 8 to 10 assignments / projects due each week between the two classes. I would get up around 8 a.m. and I would not get to bed until 4 a.m. the next day. Another issue that I was having was with many of photographic assignment I was told I need to photograph people.....well, that would be fine but to fact that I have PTSD, crowds and I do not get along. I get very nervous and fell enclosed. I told my instructors and academic advisor (which I five during my time at AiO) about that I was unable to go out in crowd of people and start taking photographs. I finally contacted my academic advisor and told her that I was really struggling with my classes. I had asked her if there were remedial course that I could take (for math), or if there was any kind tutoring, such as "face to face. I told that there were no tutoring services available for me. I asked why, because I had told my enrollment officer that I was disabled veteran. My academic advisor did know that I was disabled, I was furious. She told that I had to apply for disability accommodations. The person I need to contact was Ms. Sarah White Assistant Disability Director.

I was still considered to be withdrawn from school when I contacted Ms. White. When speaking with Ms. White I explained to her what was going on and that I was struggling my classes. She said that I needed to apply for disability services and also needed to submit "evidence" of my disabilities. After about week I was readmitted to school with accommodations. My accommodation was that I was given one extra day to complete my assignments. I was unable to get simplified instructions, which frustrated many of my instructors. So, I had to break down assignment into simple bulleted format, in which my wife assisted me in doing. There was one photography assignment that I messed royal that my instructor

asked me what I was doing. My wife had e-mail my instructor back asking her for clarification for the assignment. My wife explained to the instructor that I had a hard time following complex instructions. My instructor was kind enough to simplify the instructions through my wife. Only one instructor offered tutoring at designated time during the week which I attended religiously, this was one my math classes.

During my struggle with the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, I was contact by a journalist Dan Golden from Bloomberg, who had heard about my demise with AiO (Art Institute of Pittsburgh, Online) and wanted to interview about my experience with AiO. I said I that I would be pleased grant him an interview. Hoping this would affect change in the way AiO was treating me. When Mr. Golden arrived at my home in August of 2010 and we did some talking before the interview, making me feel at ease with him. He asked if I know that The Art Institutes were a "For-Profit" school and they charge more tuition than average on ground campus college. I was taken back, as I listened to Mr. Golden telling me about how these schools bait veterans to enroll into their schools. He also mentioned that there was an instant where a recruiter from one of these for-profit college had gotten into a wounded Marines barracks and enrolled Marines with TBI. I was angry, felling that and realizing that I had been swindled.

After the interview I continued on with my studies as best as I could, because I did not want to give up I wanted to attain my degree no matter what. Even though I knew that AiO was taking advantage of my benefits (Post / 911 GI Bill), I continue on with my courses and doing my best to deal with AiO and my assignments. In December 2010 or January 2011 PBS Frontline contacted me after they had seen Mr. Golden's article on my struggle with AiO they also wanted to interview my about my experience with the Art Institute. I was more than pleased, since the interview with Mr. Golden had no effect on how AiO was handling veterans. The PBS Frontline's piece called "Educating Sergeant Pantzke" air on June 27, 2011. A day or two after the Frontline piece aired I received a phone call from the Vice President of the Online Division of The Art Institute of Pittsburgh asked to make a statement to PBS that AiO was taking care of me and that I was doing fine. I had thought about making the statement, but wife with her infantine wisdom practical kick me in the hind end to put my brains back into my head as did my individual therapist (not literally). Within the PBS Frontline piece AiO had stated that AiO had offered me "extensive tutoring services," that was news to me because I did not receive on phone call or e-mail from AiO saying they were offering me tutoring services.

Though before Educating Sergeant Pantzke aired I was involved in a serious car accident on Easter Sunday 2011 which left me injuries where I was unable to continue with school. My right hand was broken, fractured wrist and a rib fracture. I notified AiO right away that I was unable to continue with school due to my injuries. I applied for medical leave from school, which was granted. I was told to let the school know when I would be returning to class. I was required to have surgery to pin one of my bones in my right hand together. I was in a cast hot pink cast from March to early July 2011. Once the cast came off my wife and I sat down once again to discuss if I should go back to school and was it worth the struggle. I also spoke with my individual therapist about returning to school, I was still on the wall about it at that time. I still had that military mindset not give up and do not surrender. I was in a battle.

In July or early August I was contacted by ABC wanting to interview about my experience with AiO. I figured the more attention I could get on how AiO treats veterans especially that are disabled maybe AiO would change how they do business. I did the interview with ABC Nightly News with Dianne Sawyer. ABC was going to air it that night after they done interviewing, which did not happen. I received a phone call from who I believe to be the segment producer asking me to sign a release of information so they could speak with Ai about me. I signed the release and e-mailed it back. The next day I received call from the segment producer asking me more questions about AiO. One thing that infuriated me was Ai had accused me in using funds to take exuberant trips spending money from school. I did take ONE trip to Virginia Beach, three day two night stay, but I spent my own money. I also went to VA Beach to do a photographic assignment. The ABC piece never aired.

Then in October of 2011 NBC's Rock Center contacted me wanting to interview me about my experience with AiO. I agreed to do the interview hoping that NBC would air their piece. There two other interviewees where also there being interviewed by Natalie Morales. It was myself Mike DeGiacomo and Rikk Wolf. I knew of Mike as he also appeared in Frontline's Education Sergeant Pantzke. He had contacted me shortly after the airing of Educating Sergeant Pantzke. The piece did air on NBC's Rock Center but my segment was not. When I was speaking with Mrs. Morales we discussed why I had not withdrawn for AiO due to fact that I was struggling and the amount of tuition that they charge my Post / 911 GI Bill. She was the deciding factor, along with my wife, son and my therapist. So the day after I got back from New York I wrote a withdraw letter with the main points being that the education that were giving would not yield a gratifying and successful career in photography and the lack of disability services.

Throughout my attendance at AiO my PTSD was raging. My items through my house grew wings and started flying about, yelling and screaming, I had put a hole in my wall with my elbow as I was going through a PTSD fit. My PTSD is monster or demon that I keep under tight control. When it shows its ugly head it is not pretty, everyone and everything is a target.

These days I continue to learn about photography on my own, it sad that I have learned more about photography on my own than I ever did when I was a student at AiO. I believe AiO had failed to provide proper disability services which when I was first admitted to AiO that I needed to apply for disability services and set me up for failure. I also have taken up the gauntlet to help others to make informed decision when they are considering applying to a for-profit college. I try to warn them of the pitfalls before it is too late and end up in the situation that I was in.

When I watch T.V. and I see the commercials for University of Phoenix, The Art Institutes, ITT Tech, DeVry etc. I see that they use older alumni or those are in higher professional positions where they already have degrees from other schools, or they were students before the school became possession of a corporation, and public traded on the stock market. it sickness me due fact that they lure unsuspecting potential students from all walks of life.

Now that I am no longer a student at AiO, not having worries about how I am going to this assignment in on time, or am I going to fail this class again. I work on my own creative photography. I use photographic websites like Learn My Shot (<http://www.learnmyshot.com/index.php?mode=browse>) I believe that anyone can take a picture but a photograph is created and with proper schooling a photography student can become a great photographer like Frank Capa and Annie Leibovitz.

Here is a slide show if some Annie Leibovitz, as you can see why she is an inspiration for me. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mO4pjdVseEs&feature=player_embedded

I close with this education should never be for sale and certainly education should not be trade on the stock market. It not right for anyone to benefit from a student that is attending college except the student who is striving for their future.

Thank you for your Time

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