



# ALERT Academy

*“Forging Extraordinary Men Who Influence Their World for Christ.”*

*Above: The Boulden Family in 2010. Back row, L to R: John, Jesse, Joshua, Jonathan, Cathie. Front row, L to R: James, Joel. Not pictured: Caroline.*

by John Boulden

“Mommy and Daddy, look!” The year was 1996, and we were attending our second homeschool conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. Rappelling from the rafters at a great height were almost a dozen young men in uniform! Once on the ground, they disconnected themselves from their gear and proceeded to assist in the opening ceremony for the conference as flag bearers. My ten-year-old son Jonathan was absolutely mesmerized by these impressive young men. Thus began our journey with the ALERT Academy.

Established in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in 1994, the Air Land Emergency Resource Team (ALERT) is a post-high-school Christian training and service program that is designed to transform boys into men, training them with the skills and attitudes necessary to effectively serve those in need. Our family was living in Hawaii at the time, and with our oldest children still quite young, we really hadn’t gotten to know this ministry very well. We came to understand that as an outgrowth of a homeschool program,

ALERT was meeting a number of needs simultaneously, including answering the question many homeschooling families have: What’s after high school?

During that 1996 conference, Jonathan joined dozens of 8 – 17 year olds, who were guided through several days of athletic competitions, Bible memory drills, skills such as knot tying and first aid, and demonstrations of Christian servant leadership by the ALERT men, in what is called the ALERT Cadet Challenge. As a former Boy Scout and a career Naval Officer, I was pleased to see comparable training, but completely within a Christian context. My wife Cathie and I had chosen to homeschool, as many do, because of our desire to follow God’s direction in Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” and in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

Over the years, as these conferences spread across the country, all five of our sons (see Psalm 127) were able to participate in ALERT Cadet Challenges, imagining what it would be like to attend Basic Training and become ALERT men. Cathie and I had grown in our own walk with the Lord to the point where we were focused on raising our sons and daughters for ministry, not simply vocation. ALERT was one opportunity to see that training extended beyond the walls of our own home.

In 2000, ALERT moved to an impressive campus east of Dallas in Big Sandy, Texas, and became the International ALERT Academy ([www.alertacademy.com](http://www.alertacademy.com)). The ministry includes an extended program after going through Basic Training (a military-style boot camp) as well as other ministries focused on entire families. We were able to attend Family Camp in 2002 and 2003, and our younger boys soon got involved in a local ALERT Cadet ([www.alertcadet.org](http://www.alertcadet.org)) unit.

Upon Jonathan’s completion of Basic Training in 2007, the transformation we saw in him convinced us that at a

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*ALERT recruits in Basic Training climb the "rock face" in Ouachita National Forest on their 24-hour Endurance Hike.*

minimum, each of our sons would attend Basic; as my wife said to our sons at the time, "You're all going!" Little did we know that the impact of ALERT's strong Christian leadership would be so profound that our two oldest sons, Jonathan and Jesse, would stay to fill a series of leadership positions themselves. Four of them have now attended the Academy, and our youngest, James, will enroll soon.

Joel, our most recent graduate, chose the law enforcement track. There are multiple other opportunities, including EMT and Paramedic certifications, leadership and management, aviation, fire academy, building trades, facilities and property care, etc., all designed to build teamwork, individual responsibility, and Christ-like character. Even our middle son, Joshua, who only completed the Basic Training portion, had a life-changing experience, and received the award for top recruit in a unit of almost 60 men.

ALERT has equipped him well as he enters the world of Christian theater.

Another unique aspect of the ALERT experience is the opportunity to deploy in times of crisis to assist the citizens of the United States and other countries, particularly in the wake of natural disasters. The young men receive training that allows them to clear fallen trees and debris, repair homes, conduct search and rescue and underwater recovery, and provide aid and comfort to those who are in dire need. Our sons have had multiple opportunities to assist folks who have lost everything and to "comfort them which are in any trouble . . ." (2 Corinthians 4).

I mentioned that the International ALERT Academy has multiple ministries on campus. Skills Training for Emergency Preparedness ([www.alertacademy.com/step](http://www.alertacademy.com/step)), or STEP, is a four-week program for young women ages 15 and

older. This outdoor adventure program is designed to build individual and team confidence in preparation to respond to life's emergencies, as young ladies learn to put their trust in the Lord. Our only daughter attended the second session of STEP in 2004, which has now graduated hundreds of young women who have been enriched in their spiritual and personal disciplines, physical fitness, and emergency skills. Similarly, Quest ([www.alertacademy.com/quest](http://www.alertacademy.com/quest)) offers four weeks of hands-on training for young men ages 14 and up who are beginning the transition to manhood.

As I reflect on how important the ALERT experience has been for our family, I would stress that the leadership of the instructors at ALERT is the key, because of their personal walk with the Lord, their heart for young people, and their constant emphasis on putting Christ first. All of these things are critical in guiding young men beyond their lives at home, in a way that allows them to depend on a God who truly cares for them, and reinforce Christian values, while preparing them to be the servant leaders that Christ has called us all to be (Mark 9:35). 🏠

*John Boulden is a father of six who works at the U.S. Department of Energy. As a 32-year Navy Veteran who served on four submarines, (including Command of the USS Los Angeles) he and his wife Cathie have lived all across the country and served in a number of roles in over a half-dozen Presbyterian churches. They began homeschooling in 1991, and five of their children have now graduated.*



*ALERT's Diving program offers a variety of NASE certifications.*