



CLASS OF 2015

MEET THE SCHOLARS

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Class of 2015

Architecture

- **Dallas Gray**
University of Oregon, M.Arch.

Business & Economics

- **Ron Bucca**
Columbia University, MBA
- **Mary Conroy**
University of South Florida, MBA
- **Thomas Daley**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MBA
- **Christian Dunbar**
UCLA, MBA
- **Rahul Harpalani**
Columbia University, MBA
- **Frank Hegr**
Southern Methodist University, MBA
- **Benjamin Kohlmann**
Stanford University, MBA & Master of Public Policy
- **Dino Mavrookas**
University of Pennsylvania, MBA
- **Erik Mirandette**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MBA
- **Jacquelyn O'Conner**
Northwestern University, MBA
- **Reagan Odhner**
Stanford University, B.A., Economics
- **Anthony Saffier-Ewing**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MBA
- **Brian Smith**
Harvard University, MBA
- **George Sondecker**
Harvard University, MBA

Education

- **Heather Barnett**
Alliant International University, Ph.D, Education
- **Sharon Heigh**
University of Alabama, Ed.D, Education
- **Jameson Lopez**
Arizona State University, Ph.D, Educational Policy
- **Halli Stewart**
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Ph.D, Urban Education
- **Joseph Wheaton**
Arizona State University, M.Ed, Secondary Education

Engineering

- **Shannon Alt**
Johns Hopkins University, Ph.D, Electrical Engineering

History

- **Jason Everman**
Norwich University, MMH, Military History

International Affairs

- **Paul Cusack**
Columbia University, M.A., International Affairs
- **Annie Kleiman**
Tufts University, M.A.L.D., International Affairs
- **Anthony Lena**
Tufts University, M.A., International Affairs

Law

- **Matthew Ball**
Stanford University, JD
- **Angela Menard**
University of Arizona, JD
- **Carrie Murdock**
Texas A&M University, JD
- **Adrian Perkins**
Harvard University, JD
- **Joshua Sparling**
University of Arizona, JD
- **Joshua Tarsky**
Suffolk University, JD

Linguistics

- **Karen Hansen**
UCLA, Ph.D, Germanic Languages

Medicine & Health Sciences

- **Tigon Abalos**
UCLA, Doctor of Dental Surgery
- **Sarah-Blythe Ballard**
Johns Hopkins University, Ph.D, International Health
- **John Bunyasarmanand**
Campbell University, DO
- **James Chally**
University of Washington, MCHS, Clinical Health Services
- **Linsey Clarke**
Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, DO
- **Jonathan Curley**
University of Texas Health Science Center, MD
- **Thien Ho**
Pacific Northwest University of the Health Sciences, DO
- **Adam James**
University of Minnesota, MD
- **William Jones**
University of Texas Health Science Center, MD
- **Rick Lang**
Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, MD

- **John Pasciak**
University of South Florida, Doctor of Pharmacology
- **Mark Sakai**
University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, MD
- **Fabian Suchy**
Stanford University, Ph.D, Stem Cell Biology, Regenerative Medicine
- **Michael Weipert**
Texas A&M University, MD
- **Daniel Ybarra**
UCLA, MD

Nursing

- **Katherine Hough**
University of Washington, DNP, Adult-Gerontology, Primary Care
- **Deborah Law**
Queens University, CNL, Nursing
- **Jackie Munn**
Vanderbilt University, M.S., Nursing
- **Michelle Neveu**
Saint Louis University, MSN, Acute Care Nurse Practitioner
- **Lisa Rich**
Yale University, M.S., Midwife/Women's Health Nurse Practitioner

Political Science

- **Charles Mitchell**
Yale University, M.A, Political Science & African Studies
- **Nate Smith**
Columbia University, B.A., Political Science

Public Affairs & Administration

- **David Dauphinais**
Harvard University, Master of Public Administration & Dartmouth College, MBA
- **Ann Thompson**
Princeton University, Master of Public Affairs

Public Policy

- **Amy Bowen**
Duke University, Master of Public Policy
- **Richard Marcantonio**
Indiana University, Master of Public Policy
- **Sean McLafferty**
University of Missouri, Master of Public Policy



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TIGON ABALOS

U.S. Army | UCLA | Doctor of Dentistry



“Where we come from starts our life’s path but it is the experiences we willingly choose to make that define us.”

Like many others who graduated high school with limited means, Tigon - a refugee who emigrated from Vietnam to the United States in 1995 - enlisted in the Army National Guard in 2000 to initially pay for college education. But as America quickly entered the war, Tigon made the fateful decision to delay her education and request a transfer into the active-duty Army. That choice has since shaped and defined her more than she ever imagined.

While deployed to Afghanistan in 2005, Tigon found her life’s calling while volunteering on humanitarian aid missions to the refugee camps outside Kabul. There she saw a desperate need for medical professionals, especially dentists. With this new perspective, she traded her combat boots for a textbook and backpack to return to college. Today, while studying at the UCLA School of Dentistry, she is passionate about helping underserved geographic areas and underrepresented minority populations. She believes that with her combined insight as a veteran and minority, she can be a more empathetic and compassionate healthcare provider in local communities.

In addition to her studies, she recently co-founded the Operation Bruin Smiles pilot program at UCLA to subsidize dental care for veterans and foster youths. She has also volunteered at the West Los Angeles VA Hospital where she assisted the dentists with oral surgery for the veterans in the facility. More recently, her life came full-circle on a humanitarian mission to her native Vietnam, where she provided free dental care to impoverished villages in the countryside.

After graduation, Tigon plans to pursue a VA hospital residency, and then a career as a dentist in the VA hospital system while continuing her service in the Reserves.



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SHANNON ALT

Military Spouse | Johns Hopkins University | Ph.D, Electrical Engineering



“My service to my community is largely defined by my passion for teaching and joy in helping others continue their education.”

Throughout her childhood, Shannon was raised in an environment typical to that of children whose parents serve on active duty, living on numerous military installations until the beginning of her undergraduate studies. The unparalleled work ethic and steadfast commitment to duty that she was exposed to within her family inspired her to pursue a research career that could positively shape the lives of those in the community, and the lives of members of the military.

The dedication of her father and grandfather, who spent their professional careers as military officers, made clear to Shannon the sacrifices and risks which service members are willing to undertake. Shannon’s studies eventually transformed from equations and experiments on a page to very real questions relating to the people closest to her: Why weren’t sufficient chemo-protectants developed for use in Vietnam? How could better materials science characterization studies be performed for protection in helmets, etc?

Now, as a Navy spouse, Shannon is even more acutely aware of the demands facing service members. Currently, she is working towards her Ph.D. in electrical engineering at Johns Hopkins University, and hopes to serve as a researcher in a laboratory affiliated with the Department of Defense to develop cutting edge engineering sensors and optical devices to support service members.



SARAH-BLYTHE BALLARD

U.S. Navy | Johns Hopkins University | Ph.D, International Health



“The military has taught me that there is a greater good that unites us as squadron mates, countrymen, and global citizens.”

On 9/11, Sarah-Blythe was finishing the last of her medical school prerequisites when she realized that just going into medicine wasn't enough. She wanted to help her country--and she eventually found her calling as a Navy Flight Surgeon.

In the Navy, board certified in Aerospace and Preventive Medicine, Sarah-Blythe has led medical mishap investigations for over 20 incidents around the globe, overseen emergency response while deployed downrange, and mourned the lives of friends and colleagues who died flying honorably far from home. Collectively, these experiences have motivated her to prevent the loss of more lives, constantly reminding her of the human element behind each mishap report and crash data set.

Whether in the clinic, in the classroom, or in the cockpit, her military training has provided her with the skills to think critically about the situation at hand, incredible mentors and inspiring corpsmen with which to work, and the discipline to persevere in the face of adversity. In order to make a greater impact as a career medical officer, Sarah-Blythe is pursuing her PhD in Global Disease Epidemiology & Control at Johns Hopkins University. This special skill set will allow her to contribute to the unique needs of individuals deployed or living in remote and tropical settings.

Upon completing PhD training, she will return to the Navy to become a Scientific Department Head of Naval Medical Research Unit Number Six in Peru. Afterward, she hopes to represent the Navy at the World Health Organization and continue serving the international community.



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MATTHEW BALL

U.S. Army | Stanford University | Juris Doctor



“The most satisfying experiences I’ve had in the military all have something in common: helping people who don’t have a voice.”

After completing a notable college education and turning down a job offer at a prestigious hedge fund in New York, finance seemed to be the next logical step for Matthew. But after sensing something was missing, he joined the Army instead. Throughout six years and four deployments, the most important lesson Matthew learned was that real change is hard, takes time and is often fleeting - but is worth the effort in the end.

Daily life and missions varied widely between each deployment for Matthew, but what he found most enjoyable and inspiring was the opportunity to help those most in need - whether local Pashtuns asking for basic services, civilians in Kabul living in constant fear of attacks, or Syrians seeking to overthrow the repressive Islamism around them.

Providing help to disenfranchised people inspires Matthew and this is what he intends to dedicate his life towards by earning a dual degree in Law and Public Policy. Matthew aspires to be involved in legal clinics and do pro-bono legal work while completing his degree. Upon graduating, Matthew has a goal of becoming a public attorney for his home state of Colorado. Community building is very important to Matthew, largely due to his first assignment helping small villages govern themselves in Afghanistan. Matthew believes strongly in the ability to effect local change and hopes to use his law degree to serve others in a similar capacity.

College taught Matthew how to think, but the military taught him how to implement complex ideas in challenging situations. For the past six years Matthew has excelled at successfully implementing policy on villages in Eastern Afghanistan, enemy networks surrounding Kabul, and Syria, and now hopes to do so within the legal system of the United States.



HEATHER BARNETT

Military Spouse | Alliant International University | Ph.D, Education



“Ensuring that my son receives the best education possible to fit his specific needs is my top priority.”

Following the death of her husband in May 2014 while serving as a Lieutenant Commander, Heather is a mother of two young children in addition to serving as a school counselor, conducting individual and group counseling for students that addressed issues pertaining to adjustment, ADHD, parental separation and divorce, and the death of a parent.

In 2009, their two-year-old son was diagnosed with Autism, leaving Heather and her husband to face an endless procession of speech therapy, occupational therapy, music therapy and applied behavioral analysis. With her and her husband always working as a team, their purpose in life was the same, to serve those in need and support each other.

Now as a single parent, Heather’s ultimate goal is to honor her husband’s service to his country and their children by pursuing a career in developing and improving upon programs that support and encourage the educational success for students with moderate to severe Autism in community colleges and universities. With a specific research interest in understanding the predictors of higher learning success among young adults with moderate-severe Autism, Heather is interested in designing programs equipped with proper supports, accommodations and trained personnel that will enable those who require more assistance to complete one, two or four year degree programs and find suitable employment that fits their skillset.

Ensuring that her son receives the best education possible to fit his specific needs is Heather’s top priority. The challenges faced in ensuring he has an appropriate education have informed her understanding of programs geared toward Autistic children and young adults and is only natural that she extend this interest and knowledge to her professional life, both in effort to fulfill her personal interest and passion, and to ensure that her son continues to receive the resources he needs to succeed.



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AMY BOWEN

U.S. Army | Duke University | Master of Public Policy



“I originally joined to serve individuals as a nurse and return patients to the best quality of life possible. Now, I strive to have a larger sphere of influence and address broken social systems.”

As a junior in college, Amy was heavily involved in her Army ROTC Battalion, preparing for what was ahead, becoming a third generation military brat. Starting her time in the service in the medical field as a nurse, during her first deployment to Iraq Amy aspired to be tactically operational but still aspired to help others and in turn applied to become a Civil Affairs officer. While being tested physically, mentally, and on an operational deployment, Amy realized that being herself allows her to do her job better in the long run – regardless of whether or not she was working for the government in a male dominated occupation.

Originally joining the military to serve individuals as a nurse and return patients to the best quality of life possible, Amy now strives to have a larger sphere of influence and address broken social systems by transitioning from active military service to attending Duke University in order to obtain her Master’s in Public Policy. Amy’s goal is to connect her experiences as a nurse and Civil Affairs officer by pursuing a career in the global policy field through government agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) where she will have the opportunity to assist countries in providing essential services for themselves.

Through her experiences as a veteran and military decision making processes, Amy wants to be a source of continuity between military and their civilian counterparts, assisting with civil-military cooperation so that national objectives are met, ultimately helping the international community as a whole.



RONALD BUCCA, JR.

U.S. Army | Columbia University | Master of Business Administration



“Life will have heartache and failure, but it is during these times you learn how to succeed.”

Ron’s journey began when the World Trade Center towers fell on 9/11. The ensuing weeks became a blur as he spent time looking for his father at Ground Zero and ultimately laying him to rest. However, the stories of his father’s kindness and generosity shared by others during this time remained clear in his mind. He realized the financial incentives that dictated his career path prior to 9/11 were no longer a priority for him. He left the financial industry to enlist in the Army. Ron not only wanted to help protect others from terrorist attacks, but he also wanted to find a deeper connection with his father, who led a life of service.

Through multiple deployments Ron learned that clean water, food, and access to education are not always guaranteed; yet, they are imperative for the stability and security of a region. He came to understand that government or military intervention alone cannot provide a long-term solution to end the threat of terrorism. The best solution to defeat terrorism is through socio-economic change and to empower individuals to improve their quality of life. Through his military experience and studies at Dartmouth College he realized the most effective agents for social change and individual empowerment are organizations and businesses that can leverage the strength of the private sector in a socially responsible and sustainable way.

Ron will pursue an MBA at Columbia University focused in social enterprise. His goal is to help individuals and organizations create profitable and sustainable businesses that improve their own socioeconomic situation and that of their region.



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JOHN BUNYASARANAND

U.S. Army | Campbell University | Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine



“As a future physician I look forward to finding new ways to serve my family, friends, and community by continuing to do what I have always done: serve others.”

John served in the Army for eight years before separating to pursue his college degree. A year and a half later, September 11 brought our country into war. Determined to finish college, John stayed the academic course, and went on professionally, knowing that while he was working his buddies were deploying and fighting. Pondering this while at his desk one day, his wrist began to hurt and he thought to himself, “Guys are getting shot and blown up, and I’ve got carpal tunnel. I’m not going out like this.”

John walked away from a lucrative civil engineering career and re-enlisted to try out as a combat medic, in spite of being told he would have to go through basic training and jump school all over again. He gives his wife Mary Ann a lot of credit for taking this leap of faith with him. Meeting his team downrange as an unproven medic, John shared concerns with a physician who told him “Trust your medicine.” While managing his first bad casualty, in the dark and in the dirt, John proved his medicine.

At Campbell University, John is now working to complete a Doctor of Osteopathy degree, so that he can continue in the military as a physician and return downrange to take care of U.S. troops.



JAMES CHALLY

U.S. Army | University of Washington | MCHS, Clinical Health Services



“While I learned many lessons from my active duty service in the Army, the most important lesson was defying my personal limits and impact.”

Shortly after college, James enlisted in the U.S. Army and deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan where he conducted village stability operations. During his tours, he was responsible for medical and trauma issues for his team and the local population, and grew increasingly interested in the healthcare profession.

The impact James made overseas with his medical skills has since inspired him to pursue a Master’s degree in clinical health services as part of the University of Washington’s Physician Assistant program. He aspires to carry his past success forward as a licensed Physician Assistant supporting underserved communities abroad while continuing his service in the Army National Guard. Long-term, he wants to develop a PA program in southeast Asian countries, filling a critical medical gap in underserved populations.



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LINSEY CLARKE

U.S. Army | Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine | Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine



“In whatever way possible, it is important to use our own unique gifts and talents to give back to the community, and since our time here is finite, to do so at every available opportunity.”

Linsey grew up knowing that he wanted to serve his country, but didn't realize just how his choice to enlist in the Army would shape his future. Every day, the men he served beside as a medic motivated him to give his best. Whether conducting missions or seeing patients in medical clinics in Afghanistan, he discovered countless opportunities to challenge himself and place others first. Returning home, he watched the families of his fallen friends turn tragedy into an opportunity to improve the lives of others. This left an indelible mark on Linsey, and combined with his experiences providing medical care to underserved populations in Afghanistan, inspired him to pursue a career as a physician.

Serving overseas, Linsey observed first-hand how individualized medical care transformed not only the patient, but also the whole community. Similar to the Afghans that traveled long distances to seek care in his medical clinic, Linsey sees critical gaps in care for rural communities in the United States with limited or no access to healthcare. Now, as a medical student at the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, he is studying to become an emergency or family medicine physician, so he can practice in these underserved areas. In an ever-evolving healthcare environment that is driven by efficiency and profits, he is confident that the experience he gained in the military will be invaluable to help him treat those most in need.



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MARY CONROY

U.S. Army | University of South Florida | Master of Business Administration



“It was not until I came face to face with real poverty and witnessed true destruction that I honestly appreciated what I had in life.”

Motivated by a desire to serve in the footsteps of her family, Mary entered the U.S. Air Force Academy in June 2001. Four months later, the World Trade Center was attacked and she became more determined than ever to serve her country.

During her senior year, Mary took the unique opportunity to switch branches upon graduation and enter the U.S. Army to serve as a Human Intelligence Officer. She saw it as her best opportunity as a female service member to actively support combat operations. While deployed to Iraq and Korea, Mary was tasked with analyzing the funding sources of local terrorist networks and anti-state organizations. After deploying home, she had the opportunity to further work within Goldman Sachs' Internal Audit Department as part of the Veterans Integration Program, gaining greater insight on the rules and regulations that govern the financial industry around the world.

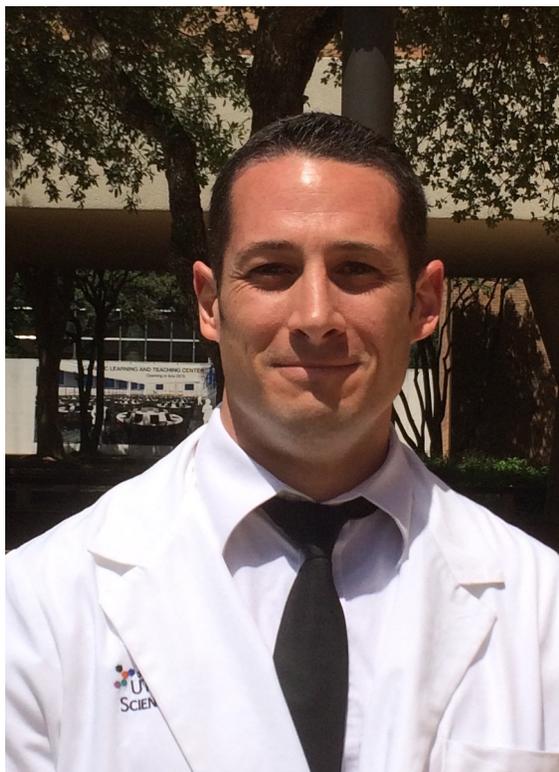
At the University of South Florida, Mary is now pursuing her MBA with a specialization in Compliance, Risk and Anti-Money Laundering. After graduation, she wants to pursue a career in the financial industry with a focus on countering terrorist network financing. She intends to continue her service in the Army Reserve.



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JONATHAN CURLEY

U.S. Air Force | University of Texas Health Science Center | Doctor of Medicine



“I served for all those who served before me. I served to serve them.”

After the 9/11 attacks, Jonathan wanted to do his part to defend our country as much as provide medical support to service members in need of care on the battlefield. The stories of young men and women losing their lives weighed heavily on him. He knew that the wars were heavy crosses to bear, and that they were being held up by an exhausted few.

As a Pararescueman in the Air Force, Jonathan often served as the first line of care for injured service members in the field, and his experiences shaped his initial interest in trauma and emergency care. But over time he became more emotionally invested in the outcomes of his patients' injuries, learning that some would eventually endure more than 30 surgeries and thousands of hours of rehabilitation. As a PJ, he came to realize that truly saving these men from the battlefield was a long, if not endless journey--and now, he wants to aid their long term care.

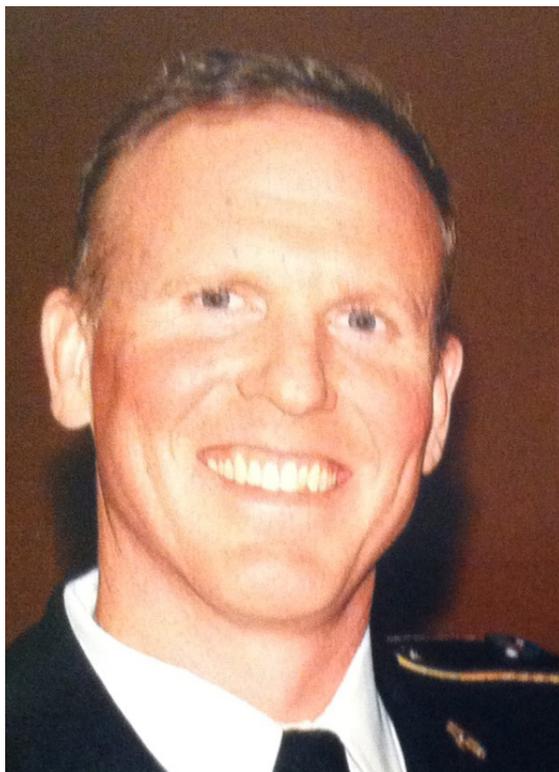
While pursuing his medical degree, Jonathan hopes to work for the VA or within the military health care system, providing rehabilitation care to veterans and active-duty service members. He specifically wants to work with patients suffering from Traumatic Brain Injuries, amputations, and spinal cord injuries with the goal to manage their pain, optimize prosthetics, and alleviate other injury-related medical issues to help them achieve their mobility and goals.



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PAUL CUSACK

U.S. Army | Columbia University | M.A., International Affairs



“I believe ideas are the most powerful thing on earth, and that over time, the power of human conscience coupled with faith, hope and science is the thing that will move history.”

Following a unique 1000-mile hike along the US-Mexican border in the fall of 2009, Paul made the decision to enlist in the U.S. Army to support counter-terror operations overseas. When it came time to re-enlist, he made the decision to pursue a degree in International Affairs and move from the tactical part of war and conflict to the strategic management side of that same equation.

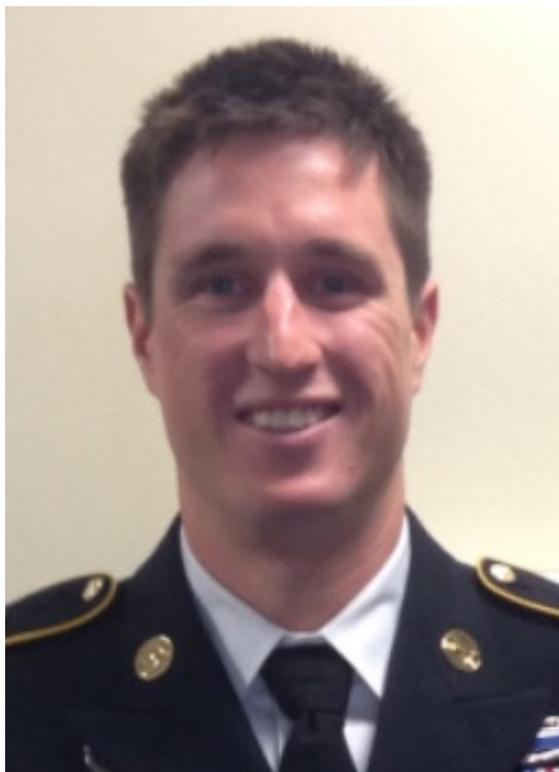
Throughout his service, Paul credits the military with teaching him the most important lesson of all: humility. He sees it as the key ingredient for long-term success for individuals and organizations. After his immersion in the Army, he now aspires to transition back into the world of private sector ideas and collaboration, and his hope is to convince more leaders in the public and private sectors to consider a similar manner of thinking about our country's international obligations.



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THOMAS DALEY

U.S. Army | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | Master of Business Administration



“I told my family I was enlisting in the Army after graduation, and my older brother immediately said he was coming with me.”

At age 14, Thomas watched the attacks of September 11, unfold, but while he credits that day as the most formative in his generation’s collective memory, it wasn’t until years later that he and his older brother finally had the chance to enlist in the U.S. Army.

During multiple combat deployments overseas, Thomas began to comprehend the full complexity of some of the issues facing Afghanistan and countries around the world. He often found himself attempting to improve both the security and economic sustainability of his foreign counterparts to ensure their success beyond U.S. involvement. But the prevailing lesson from his military service was that force requires equal parts diplomacy to address the root causes of conflict.

Today, this lesson is motivating him to pursue his MBA from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he brings unique perspective on international relations from an operational level. He believes that most successful international relationships in future generations must be a delicate balance of military, economic, and government spheres. After business school, he hopes to work for the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, or United States Agency for International Development to continue his service and contribute innovative, complex solutions for global issues.



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DAVID DAUPHINAIS

U.S. Navy | Harvard University | Master of Public Administration
Dartmouth University | Master of Business Administration



“I believe military service is our nation’s best incubator for young leaders.”

Among the last class of officers to have sworn the oath of service before 9/11, David joined the Navy motivated by the desire to be a part of something bigger than himself. In the decade since, his military service has given him the confidence to look past his fear of failure or the unknown.

As his active-duty career comes to a close, David credits the Navy with indelibly shaping his leadership ability and passion for public service. In training, he learned to build trust with his boat crew through shared struggle. He later saw firsthand the value of remaining calm under pressure as a combat leader. As a staff officer, he learned to stoke the effectiveness of a diverse team by communicating openly, providing clarity of purpose and remaining accountable.

Now, with national security still in mind, David is pursuing both an MBA and Master of Public Policy with concentrations in energy and behavioral economics. Although the advent of hydraulic fracturing and lateral drilling has shifted perceptions of U.S. energy security, he believes transmission infrastructure, degrading nuclear weapons material, and severe pipeline inefficiencies require more innovative public-private solutions. In the years ahead, he hopes to work with the Pentagon’s Operational Energy Plans and Programs Office and the National Nuclear Security Administration to implement better energy security practices across the U.S. government and private sector.



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CHRISTIAN DUNBAR

U.S. Navy | UCLA | Master of Business Administration



“There is nothing that we can’t do when we put our mind and our passion to it. We can change the world... and we must take our place in making positive change happen. For if not us, then who?”

Growing up during the height of the Cold War, Christian felt there seemed nothing more important than defending the survival of the American way of life. Since receiving a Navy ROTC scholarship for college, his military career has been much more than he could have ever expected, spanning over 22-years, 44 countries and four different combat campaigns. In his own words, he has been fortunate to have led operations at critical and strategic crossroads in world history.

Through his service, Christian has seen, first hand, the heroism of service members on a daily basis, the ferocity of their fight for each other, their dedication and passion taking care of the wounded and fallen, and the compassion they have with families who are simply caught up in war trying to survive. Above all, he has been humbled by the complete selfless dedication of those who have directly served with and for him.

Today, while pursuing his studies in business at UCLA’s Anderson School of Management, Christian continues to serve in the Navy. His academic and future career goals are specifically rooted in a deeper sense of purpose to adapt lessons from the military to bring about substantial and lasting social change on the topic of sexual assault and domestic violence prevention. As the father of three girls and a veteran who has witnessed atrocities overseas, he wants to create meaningful change across companies, organizations and college campuses, where it’s estimated 1 in 4 students are assaulted in their time at university. He hopes to bring his decades of leadership and experience in developing and delivering behavioral health and ethical culture programs bring about broader social change.



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JASON EVERMAN

U.S. Army | Norwich University | MMH, Military History



“When one thinks about it, the human story was, for better or for worse, forged by war. Military history is in many ways the history of humanity.”

After some digression during his early adulthood, such as working as a commercial fisherman in Alaska and touring Europe and the Americas as a professional musician, Jason enlisted in the Army at the age of 25. Joining the military taught Jason to do what will validate him internally, not externally; and not be a slave to “cool” and thinking for himself. The most important takeaway Jason received from the military service was a sense of camaraderie he developed with the the men and women that he served with. They became his family.

Having completed his undergraduate at Columbia University, earning a Master’s degree in Military History at Norwich University is part of a broad transition plan. Most appealing to Jason is becoming a writer, an academic, or both, his life’s path has been dictated as much by what he does not want to do as what he wants to do. During the course of his primary education, as well as his time at a small community college in Washington State and Columbia University, the teachers and professors who had real-world experience outside of the bubble of academia were the ones Jason found most compelling and engaged with the history of the world.

Upon completion of his post-graduate studies and transitioning to a role of an academic or educator, Jason aspires to have the same effect on his future students that his teachers and professors had on him. Jason hopes that his life experience of war, participating in history, adds a gravitas to lectures and writing that a purely theoretical education would not.



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DALLAS GRAY

U.S. Air Force | University of Oregon | Master of Architecture



“My father once told me that the key to leading a life worth living is to give yourself up to a greater cause, to sacrifice and try to contribute more to society than you take.”

Inspired by his father who voluntarily enlisted during the Vietnam War, Dallas and his two brothers followed in their father’s footsteps and enlisted in the military, all joining the 133rd Airlift Wing. Taught by his father that the ‘key to leading a life worth living is to give yourself up to a greater cause, to sacrifice and try to contribute more to society than you take’, Dallas’ father assured him it was something he would understand if he were to ever join the military.

It was after several deployments overseas to Afghanistan, Germany, and Norway that Dallas realized the wisdom of his father’s words. The concept of always giving more than himself is what led him down his current career path, to study and implement sustainable architecture in order to improve the quality of our built environment in a meaningful and lasting way, in addition to mentoring current undergraduate architecture students.

While deployed in 2007 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and interrupting his undergraduate education in architecture, Dallas viewed sustainable design in a new way and as a result was inspired to re-think how the field of architecture could implement sustainable design. Having visited 16 different countries throughout Europe and Asia, Dallas plans to offer a unique perspective to architectural problems while providing inspiration in the field of architecture, bringing creativity and dedication to help shape the world around us in a long-lasting sustainable way.



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KAREN HANSEN

Military Spouse | UCLA | Ph.D, Germanic Languages



“My husband’s deployments and injuries caused me to dig deeper inside myself to become more resilient... and reach out to others going through difficult times.”

As a military spouse, Karen has worked in her own right to preserve U.S. national security, working on issues related to counter-proliferation, cyber-threat analysis, digital forensics, and incident response. Since 9/11, the perspectives she has gained from her husband’s overseas deployments, his injury and recovery process, and her own experiences have strengthened her resolve to act as a bridge between the government and academia to support the resiliency of the military community while protecting U.S. national security interests.

Today, enrolled as a Ph.D. candidate at UCLA, Karen wants to leverage her multilingualism to serve as a government terrorism analyst, identifying linkages between events occurring in the United States and abroad. In addition to her studies, she works with InfraGard Los Angeles, a national partnership between the government and private sector to protect critical national infrastructure.



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RAHUL HARPALANI

U.S. Army | Columbia University | Master of Business Administration



“Strength has less to do with how much one can lift, and more to do with how one reacts when faced with extreme, discomforting, and ambiguous challenges.”

Rather than follow in his father's footsteps as a fourth generation engineer, Rahul - who monitored daily the reports of soldiers killed in Afghanistan - decided to apply to West Point during his senior year of high school. In 2010, only two days away from the end of his first combat deployment to Afghanistan, Rahul's strength was tested when he was injured by a roadside bomb.

Told he would be 'lucky' to ever walk again, Rahul defied every expectation for his recovery. He went on to jump with the 173rd Airborne and return to combat operations in Afghanistan, despite a traumatic amputation.

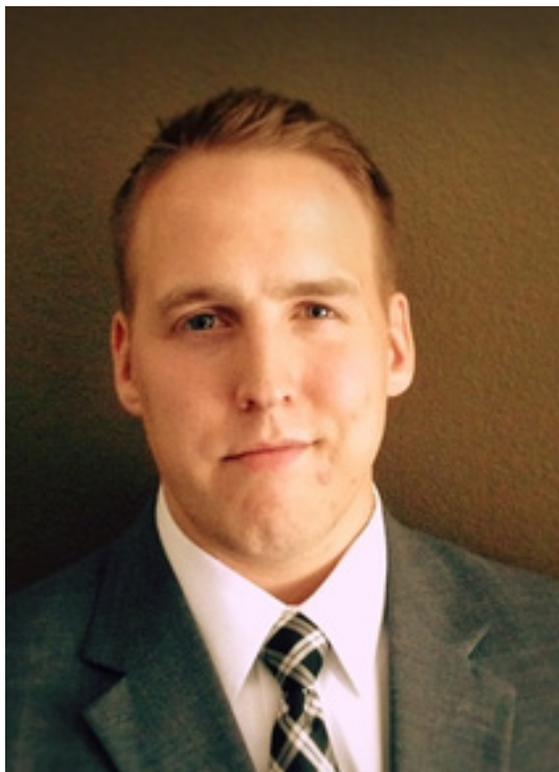
Rahul's experiences as a patient have led him to pursue an MBA at Columbia University, with the goal of working at a healthcare company to implement sustainable healthcare infrastructure among the poorest, and most ignored, demographics. Currently working at the Department of Veterans Affairs, he aspires to lead one of the 153 VA regional medical hospitals nationwide to implement lasting change for veterans and their families.



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FRANK HEGR

U.S. Army | Southern Methodist University | Master of Business Administration



“It is the duty of our service members to secure today for the United States of America, so I will be honored to accept the duty to secure their tomorrow by managing their future financial needs...”

Putting his graduate studies aside for duty to country and family, Frank joined the U.S. Army, deploying on four combat tours while learning to persevere through volatility, accomplishing the mission and overcoming adversity along the way. Wounded in Afghanistan by a suicide bomber, Frank learned the importance of preparing for the unexpected through training and thinking, maintaining war principles in his civilian life.

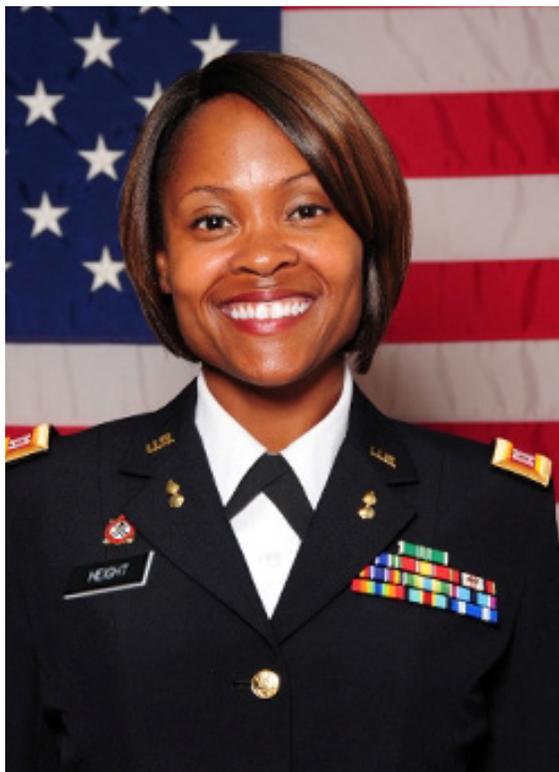
Wounds Frank received in combat forced him to end his military career, but not his commitment to his country and his fellow servicemen and women. Frank now looks in the direction of Finance as a means to continue his tradition of service to our country. With the goal of becoming a Financial Analyst, Frank continues to shift his focus from what he can't do, to what he can do for his comrades, such as assisting military members in retirement and financial planning by managing funds in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).

Frank's goal is to ensure the future of both active duty and retired service members by implementing a conservative, long-term investment strategy managed by former Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines who see military members as people, not sources of profit. As his career progresses, Frank plans to work towards becoming a fund manager for the TSP and volunteer his services to Veterans' agencies, applying his education and training to support the financial interests of those in our military.



SHARON HEIGH

U.S. Army | University of Alabama | Ed.D, Education



“I’ve learned that if your life is not committed to serving others, then it is not worth living.”

After taking advice from her sister, 'don't live life with regrets', Sharon decided to follow in her late father's and brother's footsteps and join the service, ultimately making her realize that her service is the rent she pays for living. The most important lesson Sharon learned during her time serving came in Mazar E Sharif, Afghanistan, learning that 'freedom is worth having and worth dying for.' Upon arriving in Bagram, Afghanistan and met by some of the nicest people at the USO, Sharon offered to pay for her soda and popcorn when the individual behind the counter pointed to a picture of Pat Tillman on the wall and said, "the family of Pat Tillman supports the soldiers." Sharon stared at a photo that stared at her and when she read Pat's story she felt empowered to do all she could to carry his sacrifice with her throughout her deployment.

Sharon plans to obtain a doctorate degree in Higher Education Administration with a career goal of ultimately leading a college or university as their President or Chancellor. With service in the military preparing her for management of diverse people's educational pursuits as well as multi million dollar budgets, Sharon plans to use her lessons to serve as a catalyst for positive global change in the United States and abroad. While serving others and the community through advancing future leaders' educational objectives through academic preparedness, Sharon plans to make an impact through her career and continued service by serving as an academic mentor to junior officers and noncommissioned officers.



THIEN HO

U.S. Army | Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences | Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine



“The military has provided me with numerous growth opportunities and it is my goal to continue to serve and help inspire other soldiers.”

As a first generation Vietnamese college student, Thien felt compelled to serve the country that willingly opened its arms to his family when they emigrated. After graduating from college, he enlisted in the U.S. Army to serve as a combat medic, and deployed to numerous countries, including Iraq and Afghanistan, where he gained new responsibility caring for the mental health of his team.

During his service, Thien unfortunately witnessed fellow soldiers return home from deployment with undiagnosed health problems, including Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, only to deploy back to combat without treatment. Missed cases like those now serve as his primary motivation to pursue his medical degree. In the case of two friends, Thien strongly believes that their mental injuries could have been prevented had their unit realized the severity at the time and encouraged treatment protocol.

While enrolled in medical school, Thien continues to serve in the Washington State Army National Guard. He also remains active in the local community and recently became one of the founders of the Yakima Health Equity Forum (YHEF), an organization that brings together students, physicians, and local citizens who are committed to improving the health of Yakima.



KATHERINE HOUGH

Military Spouse | University of Washington | DNP, Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner, Primary Care



“Being a registered nurse has been an incredible honor and responsibility... I am ready and motivated to influence policy and care for women veterans as a nurse practitioner.”

Throughout her husband Ryan’s 15 years of active duty, including four combat tours, Katherine (Kate) witnessed first-hand the importance of accessible quality healthcare for our nation’s heroes and their families. As her husband retires from active duty service, Kate feels it is now her turn to lead, influence medical policy and serve as a nurse practitioner focusing on women veterans’ health care.

At a very young age, Kate admired her grandmothers. Both were registered nurses and both lost their lives at young ages to breast cancer and ovarian cancer. Becoming a registered nurse and an advocate for women’s health was a natural step for Kate. Having witnessed many emotional homecomings from combat deployments of women Marines firsthand, Kate often wondered who would address the unique needs and health challenges of women veterans. As a result of her involvement in the military lifestyle, the national shortage of primary care providers and the growing number of women in our services, Kate feels a strong commitment to expand her scope of practice as a primary care nurse practitioner to better serve women veterans.

Following graduation from The Catholic University of America, Kate was selected from over 200 highly competitive nurses to serve as a Cancer Nurse Fellow at The National Institutes of Health (NIH). Her experiences at NIH instilled a high professional standard, strong foundation in clinical research, and a commitment to lifelong learning that she would carry with her at each duty station.

As a spouse of an active-duty Marine, Kate has had the opportunity to practice nursing in a variety of clinical settings both in large institutions and rural underserved populations, conducted quality improvement projects, and has implemented a hospital-based nurse navigating program. As a Tillman Scholar and nurse practitioner, Kate plans to help define the future of primary care for women veterans, advocate for their unique health needs and provide the exceptional health care they deserve.



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ADAM JAMES

U.S. Air Force | University of Minnesota | Doctor of Medicine



“My experience in the Air Force has given me the strength and fortitude to achieve any goal that lies ahead of me.”

Having served on four separate deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom from 2006-2014, Adam has been involved in numerous combat operations. He credits his challenging childhood for his decision to join the U.S. Air Force and ultimately shaping him into the person he is today. Attending the University of Minnesota as a first generation college student, Adam is pursuing a career as a Doctor of Medicine.

During his service as a Pararescueman in the Air Force, Adam was involved in a 13-hour recovery mission of a downed F-16 outside Balad, AB, Iraq and credits his service as a technical rescue expert as the foundation for his pursuit to become a doctor. Upon completion of medical school, Adam intends to pursue a career in emergency medicine and return to the Air Force as a more knowledgeable medical provider.

Adam is also a small business owner of Vibe Ventures - a t-shirt company that uses the proceeds to help fund activities for underserved children in Tucson, AZ.



WILLIAM JONES

U.S. Navy | University of Texas Health Science Center | Doctor of Medicine



“My service has solidified my ‘never quit’ attitude and has reinforced in me the notion that there is always a way to accomplish the mission.”

Joining the military right out of high school, following in his brother’s footsteps, the decision for William to serve was life changing, learning the most important lesson of teamwork. Having been part of small teams throughout his entire military career, coupled with his work in the military, has taught William how to be a good leader and great teammate, a person who is trusted and who trusts others, especially when lives are on the line. William prides himself on being a man true to his word, reliable and skilled in his areas of focus and looks to carry those principles forward in the next chapter of his life.

Having earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics, William now looks to become a medical doctor. With principles acquired during his service, including his “never quit” attitude and believing there is always a way to accomplish the mission, William plans to carry these same principles while pursuing his medical degree. His dedication, leadership, and teamwork skills will ensure William reaches his ultimate goal of providing the best medical care possible to patients.

Upon graduation, William’s intention is to spend as much time in free clinics as possible after witnessing first hand in Afghanistan how quality medical care impacts those who have trouble accessing it. William aspires to extend the same hope he saw medicine give the villagers in Afghanistan, making a difference through the wellness of others by helping people live a healthier, fuller life.



ANNIE KLEIMAN

U.S. Air Force | Tufts University | M.A.L.D, International Affairs



“The biggest impact is sometimes made by adults willing to share their time and knowledge with the youth of their community.”

Annie fell in love with the military at the age of 11. As a cadet in Civil Air Patrol (the official Air Force auxiliary), she learned how to wear a uniform, perform drill and ceremonies, and lead dozens of her peers. For Annie, she saw enlisting in the Air Force as an opportunity to be part of something bigger than herself, to make a positive difference in the world while doing something she enjoyed. Deploying to Afghanistan in 2012 as a Cultural Support Team member, Annie’s job was to engage with women and children during “outside the wire” missions – ultimately sparking her interest in the role of women in conflict, not simply as victims but actors who can make positive impacts in conflict reduction and prevention.

Instead of the stability of a guaranteed military retirement, Annie chose to make a drastic change and go to graduate school in order to further contribute to this field. Whether she becomes a diplomat supporting the United States’ outreach efforts, a field researcher finding the ground truth, or a think tank analyst seeking to inform public policy it won’t be a standard career path for Annie, as her military service gave her the guts to make that change.

As a first year Masters student at Tuft’s Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Annie is interested in women’s roles in the security sector, both as operators and as community members. Annie feels the imminent integration of women into ground combat units presents a chance to study history as it unfolds. Additionally, she is interested in investigating how empowering women economically, socially, and politically can help society as a whole and the implications this carries for future U.S. military operations.

Upon graduation, Annie hopes to continue to serve in the public sector or at a think tank, to translate her research into actionable policy recommendations that can achieve tangible results while at the same time, recognizing that while high-level strategic thinking is important, some of the most important impacts are made by adults willing to share their time and knowledge with the youth of their community – not only making a positive impact on U.S. policy on the world stage but also in local communities.



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BENJAMIN KOHLMAN

U.S. Navy | Stanford University | MBA & Master of Public Administration



“There is immense, untapped ability residing within many of our warriors.”

Inspired by his mentor and great uncle USAF BGen David Winn, who spent five years as a POW in Vietnam, Ben joined the U.S. Navy to devote his life to a community with deep, enduring relationships. He credits his uncle with showing him that, while military life brings occasional heartache and difficulty, the crucible of service is where growth occurs.

In the Navy, Ben’s experiences have since reinforced his belief that there is immense, untapped potential residing within the veteran community. He has led the Chief of Naval Operations Rapid Innovation Cell, cultivating ideas from junior personnel, pitching them to the highest ranking officer in the Navy, and bringing them to life -- from ship-board 3D printers and Google Glass, to tabletop tactical wargames and new talent management techniques.

Now, while pursuing his MBA and MPP at Stanford University, Ben wants to help make government more effective and innovative. He sees an immense disconnect between our Industrial Age governmental processes and the rapidly evolving Information Age private sector economy, which he believes is leading to sub-optimal public policy outcomes that are out of step with the public’s daily lives. In response, he recently co-founded the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum (DEF) to actively bridge the gap between civilian and military entrepreneurs, and unite national security practitioners via nationally distributed TED-style events. While overseeing further expansion of DEF in the years ahead, Ben hopes to continue his service in a position at the White House or Department of Defense, working to solve our nation’s greatest policy challenges.



RICK LANG

U.S. Navy | Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School | Doctor of Medicine



“Whether a wounded warrior returning from combat, a child with a birth defect, or another patient to whom I can provide beneficial medical service, I want to give them the gift of being able to live a ‘normal’ life.”

It was at an early age that Rick first experienced the life altering impact that can be provided through medicine. Growing up in the suburbs of New Jersey, Rick ventured to the Naval Academy searching for a profession founded upon service, selflessness, and integrity. Lacking a true understanding of the nature of the military, Rick initially viewed his expected time in the service as a career stepping-stone versus a lifetime journey.

Ten years later, awaiting launch approval in an armed FA-18 onboard the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln while supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom, the purpose of his military service became a stark reality. Rick realized that the true purpose of military service was about utilizing the cumulative experiences of every training event completed and willingly risking everything to ensure the benefit and safety of fellow service members.

Viewed no longer as a “transition plan”, Rick now understands the military as an organization built upon the correct foundation: one of selflessness, leadership, and humility. Desiring to continue his career of service beyond the FA-18 community, Rick has decided upon a follow-on career in medicine. He aspires to combine his passion, unique military background, and civilian medical training in a quest to enhance the lives of those around him.



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DEBORAH LAW

Military Spouse | Queens University | CNL, Nursing



“I wouldn’t trade the life I had, growing up with a new school every two years. It has made me resilient to change and difficulty and enabled me to work with veteran patients everyday.”

Having begun her nursing education when she met her Active Duty Air Force husband, Deborah was also a volunteer in the military community, offering support to other military families and opening up their house to pray, eat, and share struggles of worry over a deployed dad, sweetheart or child. Deborah has a previous lifelong volunteer experience as Director of Children and Family Ministries, Nursery Coordinator, Red Cross volunteer, and a member of American Association of Critical Care Nurses and American Nurses Credentialing Center, and recently served as a volunteer in 2012 at WakeMed Cary’s Women’s Pavilion.

Growing up with her father serving in the Air Force resulted in Deborah attending a new school every two years, instilling resiliency to change and difficulty, enabling her to work with veteran patients every day, and giving her a farsightedness when a family member doesn’t understand her husband’s PTSD. Currently a VA nurse, Deborah’s professional goals will be achieved by becoming a Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL). Deborah currently serves as co-chair of a patient password hospital committee to facilitate patient’s information safety while working within her role to advance care for veterans with mental health disorders.

By pursuing her Master’s degree, Deborah will achieve her goal of having the perfect mix of clinical and leadership training which will benefit the veteran population she enjoys working with.



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ANTHONY LENA

U.S. Navy | Tufts University | M.A., International Affairs



“It is imperative to embrace all of life’s lessons equally; good or bad, we must learn from them and teach future generations to transform these invaluable lessons into positive outcomes.”

Anthony describes his service in the U.S. Navy as a privately catalogued history of invaluable life lessons. Throughout his career, he has learned that it is imperative to embrace all experiences, from combat to the classroom, and that passing this hard-won knowledge on to others transforms these events into positive outcomes in the future. For him, many of the greatest lessons have come from the men and women he served beside, who have lived with strong purpose and made inordinate personal sacrifices every day in service to our country.

Over his career of service in Naval Special Warfare, Anthony’s unique and diverse assignments have involved confronting complicated and multifaceted problems alongside senior foreign officials, policy makers and diplomats to find cooperative, amicable solutions across the globe. These engagements, highly ambiguous and complex in nature, required dynamic decision-making backed by thorough understanding and consideration of the strategic implications. Anthony’s unwavering commitment to improving the aggregate security of our interconnected world is underscored by his compelling personal experiences.

Inspired through his military service, Anthony is pursuing his M.A in International Affairs and Relations at Tufts University. Maximizing the interdisciplinary opportunities of the Global Master of Arts Program, he seeks to broaden his perspective on international affairs by engaging a curriculum that combines international political, legal, financial, humanitarian, environmental, and security studies. Upon completion, he will possess a broader understanding of the world’s geopolitical nuances, sensitivities, and agitators that impede the pursuit of our international priorities. Beyond his military service, Anthony seeks to continue his deep contribution to our nation by offering his service experience, amplified by a top-notch education, to shape future international outcomes while serving as a senior advisor on international policy.



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JAMESON LOPEZ

U.S. Army | Arizona State University | Ph.D, Educational Policy & Evaluation



“If you truly want to get across to Native American students today, you have to be involved with their communities. This is my calling as Native American leader.”

Hailing from Kwat'san (Quechan) Tribe in Fort Yuma, CA, Jameson spent a significant amount of his childhood and adult years with Native communities, learning the value of his “warrior” spirit and ultimately accepted the greatest and most respected calling in his community by joining the service. Along with Jameson, 20 family members including grandfathers, uncles and cousins have served tours as his Quechan Tribal Nation has fought in every major American battle.

As a leader of a tank platoon deployed in support of Operation New Dawn, Jameson was responsible for coordinating over 300 combat missions with the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. Experiences during deployments taught Jameson to adapt to environments to accomplish the mission at hand, but his experience attending a funeral of a teenage boy on a reservation made him realize the importance of educators' influence on young Native American students in a small community.

As veterans are highly regarded in the tribal community, Jameson plans to use his military service as a platform to serve as a leader in the education field and influence Native American communities to increase access and attainment in higher education through developing Native American education policies customized to cultural values of the respective Tribes.



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RICHARD MARCANTONIO

U.S. Marine Corps | Indiana University | Master of Public Policy



“I want to have an impact on the ‘communal good’ by serving others, and act as an agent of change instigating waves of systemic reform.”

Having served a total of five years, during Richard's first deployment to Afghanistan he was tasked with the responsibility of establishing local security working shoulder to shoulder with village leaders, uniting the Afghan leaders and raising quality of life. As a result of Richard's team efforts, villagers took charge of their own security, scaring off IED emplacers attempting to target a newly repaired school.

Seeing the fruits of his labor first hand and ultimately becoming one of his life's most defining moments, Richard plans to promote the proverbial 'communal good' by serving others, establishing sustainable security and economic stability in underdeveloped areas that are prone to violence due to a lack of livelihood, and to act as an agent of change instigating waves of systemic reform.

Richard's military experiences, combined with his advanced set of skills, have led him to a course of study in environmental policy and natural resource management at Indiana University. He wants to serve as a change agent in underdeveloped communities with a goal of quieting violence at its source before it requires a much larger sacrifice to stamp it out.



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DINO MAVROOKAS

U.S. Navy | University of Pennsylvania | Master of Business Administration



“In war, just as in life, there are daunting challenges that we will face, and it is the ability to manage fear and move forward that separates the warrior class.”

With a passion to protect his family, American citizens and the world from terrorists in the aftermath of September 11th, Dino's devotion to his country, while serving with the Navy, was reconfirmed in August 2011 when a terrorist attack on the U.S. military caused a helicopter to crash in Afghanistan, claiming the lives of 38 military personnel. Recognizing family's support of their loved one's choice to fight, and ultimately die, was extraordinary and inspires Dino to continue the legacy of his brothers that our country lost in action.

Throughout his years with the Navy, service has become a way of life for Dino, not ending when his military career does. Dino's experiences while serving have allowed him to train SWAT units that would be called if an attack on America were to occur. Realizing the impact he can have on their readiness has motivated Dino to create an innovative security company that will revolutionize the training of law enforcement. Earning an MBA will allow Dino the ability to refine leadership skills while giving him the business acumen necessary to create and operate a company.

As Dino exits the military, he hopes to bridge the gap between this nation's top warriors and its top universities. By working with the schools and the special operations community, Dino hopes to create a channel for enlisted military veterans to attend top programs while still on active duty, strengthening both the military veteran community and the individual operator.



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SEAN MCLAFFERTY

U.S. Army | University of Missouri | Master of Public Policy



“It is my desire to have the impact from my service outlive my own life—not only through understanding issues that impact people, but also by educating about concerns which might have gone unnoticed.”

With a passion to fight for others and defend America, Sean joined the Army as an Infantryman upon graduating from high school. Serving a 2005 deployment to New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Sean realized there were other ways to serve his nation other than fighting wars. During a 15-month deployment to Iraq in 2006, Sean gained the appreciation of altruism, perseverance, and teamwork, setting an unparalleled precedence for the rest of his life.

Switching to a reservist role in 2008 and enrolling in college, Sean has had the opportunity to empathize with junior soldiers and plans to ensure public policy works for individuals who have been forgotten or have no voice. Currently studying at University of Missouri’s Truman School of Public Affairs, seeking a Master’s degree with a specialization in Public Policy, Sean also plans to earn a Juris Doctorate in order to positively affect countless lives.

Serving others has always been a rewarding experience for Sean, and that is the major reason he is the founding Platoon Leader of the Columbia Service Platoon for The Mission Continues. It is Sean’s desire to educate people about concerns which otherwise might have gone unnoticed and stand up and fight for the people who need it most.



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ANGELA MENARD

U.S. Army | University of Arizona | Juris Doctor



“When I looked at the female Army soldier as a young girl, I saw an image of strength, patriotism, perseverance, confidence and pride. I joined the Army hoping to become that woman. Serving my country changed my path, and changed my life.”

Though an honor student and athlete growing up in Tucson, Arizona, Angela bypassed college to serve in the Army first. During her military service, Angela gained the confidence, discipline, strength and patriotism needed for the next chapters of her life, becoming the first college graduate in her family. The Army taught her to seek out the value and unique contributions of every team member and what it truly means to serve others. Embarking on her next mission in life, she is now pursuing a law degree at the University of Arizona to become an advocate for fellow veterans.

In addition to her studies, Angela serves veterans in the legal field through the Veterans' Advocacy Law Clinic at the University of Arizona, which is a multi-disciplinary legal clinic that provides pro bono legal services to those that have served, and their families. Angela represents veterans with criminal misdemeanors in the Regional Municipalities Veterans Treatment Court, including clients from all eras, branches, active duty, National Guard and Reserve components, as well as representing veterans in benefits cases. Recently she represented a WWII veteran before the US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Angela aspires to continue advocating for veterans after she graduates law school and hopes to use her law degree to help others, particularly those who have served.



ERIK MIRANDETTA

U.S. Air Force | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | Master of Business Administration



“Experience has shown me that social institutions can rarely be grafted into a culture by an outside force; rather, they must develop organically among the stakeholders of that country’s future.”

Erik took a leave of absence from the Air Force Academy to volunteer with non-profit organization based in North Africa, first providing relief to Sub-Saharan refugees and later helping rebuild homes following an earthquake. Joined by his younger brother Alex, they decided to set out on a backpacking expedition from South Africa to Egypt. During their last stop in Cairo they were caught in a suicide bombing while walking through a marketplace. Erik was severely injured. Alex was killed.

After several months and over 30 surgeries, Erik eventually regained the ability to walk. Eventually, Erik resolved to honor his brother’s memory by taking a stand against those who propagated the violent extremism that took Alex’s life and that had mired his country in war. Erik returned to the Air Force Academy, commissioned, and spent the next six years leading counterintelligence teams in Afghanistan, Korea, Indonesia, Japan and the United States. Serving his country as an intelligence operator allowed Erik to meet with and experience the perspectives of the local population, opening his eyes to the complex social and economic challenges that lead to extremism and conflict.

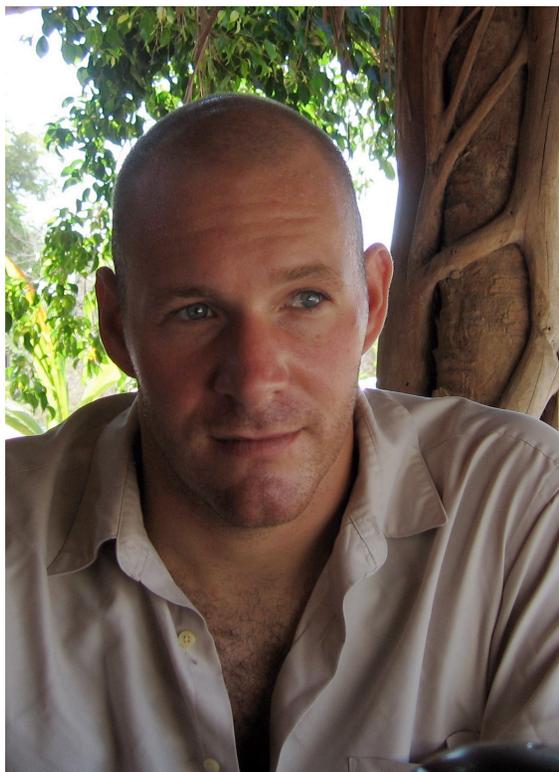
Erik looks to apply innovation to solve global challenges facing conflict stricken regions. During his two years at MIT, Erik will pursue an MBA with a focus in entrepreneurship and innovation, specifically studying early-stage business development, and the application of technological advancements to tackle real problems in meaningful ways. Following MIT, Erik’s goal is to build a community of entrepreneurs in the form of a startup incubator and venture fund. In turn, Erik will use this as a platform to find and partner with entrepreneurs in historically conflict stricken regions in the hopes of providing them with new tools to impact longstanding problems.



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CHARLES MITCHELL

U.S. Coast Guard | Yale University | M.A., Political Science & African Studies



“My military training, as well as my life experiences, reinforced my belief in the principle that you set yourself up for success by wholly throwing yourself at the challenge at hand and not considering letting yourself fail.”

Motivated by adventure and the challenge of becoming one of a few elite, well-trained, and capable search and rescue professionals, Charles joined the U.S. Coast Guard to serve as a helicopter rescue swimmer. Over the years, his training has reinforced and proved the principle that you set yourself up for success by not considering letting yourself fail.

Through his service, Charles discovered his passion for helping others, and he has dedicated himself to giving back to the community - both locally and globally. In addition to his military service, he has volunteered at his local children's oncology center with his three legged dog Norman, spent a month volunteering at an orphanage in India, and worked on children's advocacy in Chicago communities. Through all these experiences, he has tried to make people's lives a little bit better.

In 2015, Charles had the opportunity to intern in Africa with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). Motivated by that experience, he is pursuing his M.A. in African Studies at Yale University with an emphasis on the political economy of humanitarian action. In the near future, he hopes to work for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) or the United Nations.



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JACKIE MUNN

U.S. Army | Vanderbilt University | Master of Science in Nursing



“The most important lesson I learned from the Army is that leadership and service are lifelong endeavors; they do not end when you leave the military.”

Growing up in an Army family, Jackie learned that service to others is a way of life. She completed her first combat deployment to Iraq serving as a supply officer responsible for managing the provision of more than one million meals and supplies to troops in southern Iraq. Jackie also deployed to Afghanistan in 2012 as a Cultural Support Team leader where she worked with Special Forces to engage the female population in support of village stability and development missions.

However, it was Jackie’s service as an executive officer at the Warrior Transition Brigade at Walter Reed Army Medical Center where she discovered her next mission: nursing. Through her experiences working with Wounded Warriors, Jackie realized her true interest and passion for service rests in the healthcare field. She feels called to become a family nurse practitioner with a special focus on mental health. After completing her degree, she plans to work in military and veteran communities in order to continue serving those who sacrifice their physical and mental health on behalf of our nation. Due to her experiences—as an “Army brat”, veteran, and also a military spouse—she knows she can provide the kind of empathetic healthcare management that would best serve this unique population.



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CARRIE MURDOCK

U.S. Marine Corps | Texas A&M University | Juris Doctor



“My motivation is to pass along what I have learned, from my own sense of purpose, and to help those still struggling.”

With a desire to be part of something bigger than herself, Carrie entered the U.S. Naval Academy at 18 and upon graduation joined the U.S. Marine Corps, seeking to make her life more meaningful and impactful. In the military, she learned how essential every member of a team is in order to accomplish every mission. After sustaining career-ending injuries, however, Carrie became isolated from the military community that had been much more than a job - it was her calling. She struggled to find a new course for her life outside of the service.

Today, Carrie's career-ending injuries coupled with her daughter's onset seizure disorder, have given her a greater understanding of how brain injuries and other wounds are all encompassing, touching every aspect of a veteran's life and often devastating families. With this firsthand knowledge, she is now pursuing her law degree at Texas A&M University with a specialization in criminal and family law. As a legal advocate, she hopes to better serve communities of injured and struggling veterans, helping them find their voice and a new sense of purpose as she has done.



MICHELLE NEVEU

U.S. Air Force | Saint Louis University | MSN, Acute Care Nurse Practitioner



“Little did I know that the experience of being in the military would enrich my life beyond measure.”

Joining the military as a Nurse and provided with unparalleled leadership training and mentorship, Michelle's deployment to Afghanistan solidified the call she felt to care for the critically injured and ill. Michelle was offered the opportunity to study at the Air Force's Critical Care and Emergency Trauma Nursing Fellowship where she received medical and leadership training, realizing how invaluable passionate and experienced educators are to our military and health care system, giving her the motivation to one day teach future nurses.

With her and her husband both serving in the Air Force in separate locations, Michelle made the tough decision to separate from active duty to live with her husband and raise their son together. One year later, Michelle reentered the military as an Air Force Reservist continuing the important lessons of trust and teamwork while continuing to pursue her career as an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner/Nurse Education with the hopes to someday work for the V.A. caring for acute and critically ill veterans and their families.

With the unique ability as a health care provider, current service member and active-duty spouse, Michelle aspires to help solve the problems facing healthcare for military members, veterans, their families and our nation as a whole. As a Nurse Practitioner, Michelle plans to play a major part in solving the health care provider shortage, and intends to pursue her Doctorate in Nursing Education so she can teach and inspire the next generation of nurses.

Additionally, Michelle intends to stay involved as an active-duty spouse in support of her husband's unit, serving as a Key Spouse while learning from the true unsung heroes of our military. Military spouses and children have taught Michelle how to be balanced and resilient despite constant stressors that come with living a military life. Her desire is to promote and help maintain a healthy family-oriented culture in every branch of the military.



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JACQUELYN O'CONNOR

U.S. Army | Northwestern University | Master of Business Administration



“The United States represents opportunity and hope, and I want to be a part of spreading that hope around the world.”

Jacquelyn's passion for empowering those most vulnerable to abuse led her to the U.S. Army where she hoped to give victims of violent and ineffective governments a second chance. Not only was Jacquelyn able to achieve that goal by deploying in support of the War of Terror, but was also able to develop the skills necessary for future success.

She learned the importance of innovation and personal courage when she recognized a flaw in the operational systems units they were using. Jacquelyn knew a leader can't just identify problems, however, and was determined to come up with a solution and implement change. After convincing her superiors to make the change Jacquelyn's new system increased productivity and safety threefold, making the roads safer for civilians and military alike.

The continuing strife in places like Afghanistan has made Jacquelyn realize that the most effective way to combat violence is through economic development, not military action. While pursuing her MBA, Jacquelyn will focus on economic strategy and the public-private interface, with the hope of eventually progressing to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a subsection of the World Bank where Jacquelyn would specialize in women's initiatives in underdeveloped regions.



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REAGAN ODHNER

U.S. Marine Corps | Stanford University | B.A., Economics



“I learned that success is not something that will happen by accident. It is something I must consciously choose to work for every day.”

Feeling a deep-rooted pull to commit, serve, adventure and test her limits, Reagan enlisted in the Marine Corps, learning throughout that she had to earn happiness and success - it is not something that will happen by accident but something to consciously choose to work for every day. Using everything around her as motivation, Reagan later discovered it wasn't satisfying and responded instead to an internal desire to progress rather than to compete, which evolved into a genuine desire to succeed because of the use it served. By expanding her limits Reagan was becoming a more useful, reliable person, instilling confidence in her ability to pursue and attain her goals.

During her time serving with the Marines, Reagan earned a position with the elite team of women called the Female Engagement Team and after six months of training deployed with an infantry unit to Sangin, Afghanistan where they patrolled, participated in operations and on the side worked on community improvement projects and ultimately fell in love with the people and the work she was doing, risking her life to teach to those who were willing to risk their lives to come learn.

Searching for a way to return to work on development in the Middle East, Reagan began the pursuit of her bachelor's degree only to be forced to take time off after being diagnosed with stage-two blood cancer. She has since returned to Stanford to pursue her goal while taking classes and volunteering as a Director of Undergraduate Operations for Service To School, helping veterans gain college admission. Additionally, Reagan volunteers at the VA Hospital with recreational rehabilitation every week with different activities, ultimately believing one of the most important things we can invest is our time.



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JOHN PASCIAK

U.S. Army | University of South Florida | Doctor of Pharmacology



“I want to utilize my military experience to break down barriers with patients so we can improve their overall health care.”

Selfless service was the greatest lesson that John learned during his military career, and he credits the military with changing him from an unambitious timid teenager into a driven leader. Called by a sense of duty in the wake of 9/11, he volunteered for the Army infantry, earning two Bronze Stars for his service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today, his dedication to honor fallen friends motivates him to pay it forward for others at home. In the Doctor of Pharmacy program at the University of South Florida, John is specializing in pharmacogenomics in order to apply how inherited genetic differences can affect individual responses to drug treatments. As a pharmacist, he wants to serve as a trusted source for patients and to provide reliable information to a team of medical professionals.

After graduation, John hopes to practice at a Veterans Affairs hospital where he can leverage his military experience to support veterans of all generations including those like his uncle who served as an infantry medic in Vietnam. As a veteran, John believes he owes many of the tactics that kept him alive in Iraq and Afghanistan to the hard fought lessons of Vietnam. Providing the best level of healthcare is his way of giving back to the generation of Vietnam veterans whom he admires so immensely.



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ADRIAN PERKINS

U.S. Army | Harvard University | Juris Doctor



“My humble beginnings taught me that the finer things in life are bought with effort and sacrifice, not money.”

Growing up one of three brothers, competition was always in Adrian's blood. After his older brother Jeff joined the Army, Adrian was inspired to attend West Point where he served as the captain of the track team and the first African-American cadet ever to be elected class president in West Point's history. The Academy developed and nurtured Adrian's ambition, so that he not only looked forward to becoming a Soldier, but he also began seeking ways to implement the lessons he learned into communities outside of the military.

Now pursuing a law degree from Harvard University, Adrian intends to further a career serving others by returning to public service in his hometown of Shreveport, Louisiana. The lessons he learned in the Army while solving diverse problems are ones he hopes to put to good use in Shreveport, which was recently ranked last nationally in GDP growth for metropolitan areas and has suffered from both an exodus of middle class jobs and unsatisfactory public education.



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LISA RICH

Military Spouse | Yale University | M.S., Midwife/Women's Health Nurse Practitioner



“I believe that every woman should be able to experience holistic health care that respects mothers and families.”

Since 9/11, Lisa has come to know the seemingly endless days filled with anticipation and continual waiting that marks the life of the military spouse. The experience of raising a family and having four children amidst deployments, military travel, and moves has had a profound impact on the way she views families-- as well as her life calling. Watching her husband leave his family, guided in the belief that he was making life better, not only for his children, but for every American family and for the families of people in war torn regions, has taught her the importance of dedicating oneself to making a difference.

Seven years ago, armed with her experiences of being alone at birth and with a desire to help other military families, Lisa became a DONA trained birth doula. To better support mothers in the absence of their partner, Lisa is now pursuing her master's degree to become a Certified Nurse Midwife through the Yale School of Nursing's GEPN program. As a midwife, she strives to help families at their very beginnings to have safe, compassionate, and evidence-based birth options. She believes that how women are treated when they are at their most vulnerable, particularly during pregnancy and birth, can have far reaching implications into how they mother and impact future generations. Eventually, Lisa hopes to open a freestanding birth center that serves at-risk populations and to participate in international birth work.



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ANTHONY SAFFIER-EWING

U.S. Army | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | Master of Business Administration



“Collaborating to develop new medical technology is the best way to harness my passion for improving people’s lives while leveraging my military expertise.”

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan intensified, Anthony felt a distinct calling to serve and enlisted in the Army as a medic to help other service members in their most critical hour of need. The loss of several close friends in Afghanistan inspired Anthony to help others by improving medical technologies used on and off the battlefield.

At MIT, Anthony is now pursuing his MBA with a focus on medical entrepreneurship. He seeks to apply his leadership, medical, and decision-making skills from the military to an entrepreneurial healthcare setting for the benefit of veterans and the broader population. He is driven by the belief that one of his friends would be alive if specific tourniquet technology had been made available earlier, and is intensely focused on making new treatments and devices available faster. Still actively serving, he is working with two ophthalmologists, a Nobel Laureate chemist, and his R&D section to validate and field a substance that provides vast improvements when removing particulates from the eye. This capability will vastly improve his colleagues' ability to operate in austere environments.



MARK SAKAI

U.S. Air Force | University of Texas Southwestern Medical School | Doctor of Medicine



“The power of medicine became a reality to me in the austerity of Afghanistan.”

On the morning of September 11, Mark sat down for an aeronautical engineering class at the U.S. Air Force Academy when his professor informed them that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. At the time, he didn't realize how much that day would drastically alter his life's trajectory.

Five years later as a young lieutenant, Mark volunteered to be an engineer for the first AF Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Over the course of his year-long deployment, he experienced the satisfaction of providing basic services to remote villages, the anxiety and excitement of gunfights, the horror of seeing good people get hurt, and the sorrow of watching the flag draped coffins of two teammates loaded onto a C-130. His experiences in war illuminated the lesson that the life we live as Americans is a gift paid for by the blood of those willing to sacrifice themselves to preserve it.

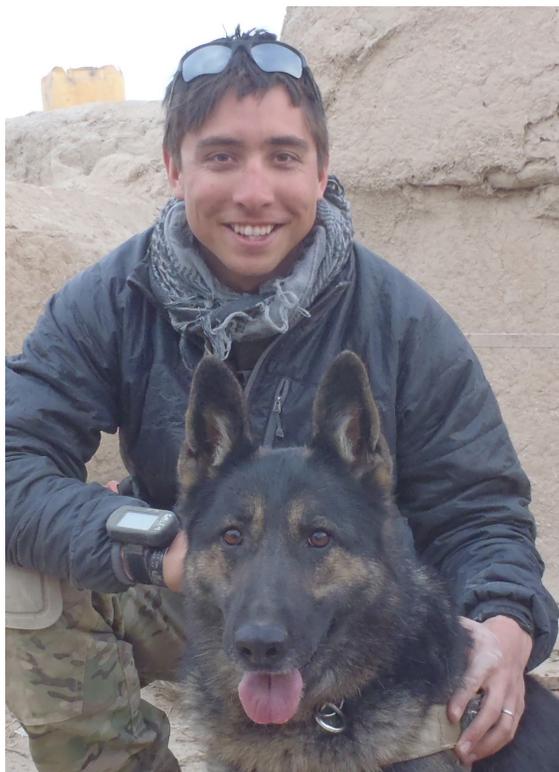
In Afghanistan, Mark was equally overwhelmed by the magnitude of the population's needs and the reality of being unable to fulfill them all; he was stunned when his simple act of applying bacitracin and a bandage to the injured leg of a child brought his father to tears. By the end of his tours, he concluded that he needed to utilize his abilities to make a difference in the world as a physician.

Now, he is pursuing his medical degree at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School to continue his service to others. After residency, Mark--a proud product of small town America--hopes to practice medicine in a small community hospital, where he can build close personal relationships with community members.



BRIAN SMITH

U.S. Navy | Harvard University | Master of Business Administration



“The humility I learned in the military will ensure that I fully leverage the power of the diverse people I lead on my path to helping others affected by TBI who want to regain lost function and reclaim their lives.”

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Brian believes the highest form of service is safeguarding human life. During deployments overseas, he has recognized the responsibility of a leader to not only serve the organization but also its subordinates. This lesson has served as a guiding principle and informed his quest to earn his MBA at Harvard University and someday run a company that develops innovative medical solutions for those affected by traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Having suffered a TBI himself, it is Brian's desire to empower veterans and others affected by these devastating injuries to lead fulfilling and productive lives. After his injury, Brian was fortunate to receive cutting-edge treatment and exceptional care from dedicated researchers and healthcare professionals, which has inspired him to explore how he might contribute to a relatively nascent but monumental effort to better diagnose, understand, and treat TBI. He believes his experience serving as the conduit between military personnel and the scientists responsible for mission-planning considerations in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear environments will enable him to work as a critical bridge between the investors, researchers, and engineers necessary to develop new treatment methodologies.



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NATE SMITH

U.S. Marine Corps | Columbia University | B.A., Political Science



“I believe that if Pat Tillman were alive today he would be working countless hours to make sure his brothers and sisters in arms were looked after. That belief motivates me to do the same.”

Motivated to enlist in the Marines after the 9/11 attacks, Nate never felt more certain about any decision in his life. If his country required men and women to answer a higher calling to protect others, he wanted to help in any way that he could.

During nine years serving with the Marines, his overseas experiences offered new perspective on military combat operations and civilian humanitarian projects. But his decision to serve came with a price. Just before separating from active-duty service, Nate lost two of his best friends, who were killed in combat in Afghanistan.

After losing his brothers, Nate felt his mission and calling to serve was not over. He wanted to channel that loss and pain into a positive outcome, providing support for other veterans struggling with issues from their service. This led him to co-found The Redstone Project, a new nonprofit for transitioning veterans.

At Columbia University, Nate is now pursuing his undergraduate studies in Political Science and International Relations with the goal to continue serving in the nonprofit sector, as well as work in the venture and startup industry. His training and deployments have equipped him to make a difference on the global stage, and as a veteran he is committed to supporting disaster relief operations overseas through Redstone and other initiatives.



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GEORGE SONDECKER

U.S. Air Force | Harvard University | Master of Business Administration



“I want to use my education, experiences, and skills to advance and expand access to the benefits of aerospace technology.”

Joining the military out of a strong sense of national pride and an interest in military technology, George's time in the Air Force has enabled him to develop as a technical leader and to pursue his passion for aerospace engineering. As a cadet, experiences building spacecraft at the Air Force Academy served as the foundation for leading an experimental satellite development program as an officer, where he and a team of junior officers developed two low-cost satellites for monitoring Earth's upper atmosphere.

With his background in engineering and business, George aspires to be a leader in aerospace. He aims to expand access to the benefits of space technology by lowering launch costs, improving spacecraft affordability, and promoting research and exploration. While attending Harvard Business School, George works in mission management at Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX) and supports the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board as an executive staff officer.

In parallel with his goals in commercial space, George aspires to apply his education and skills in the public sector, serving in the Air Force Reserves and introducing youth to careers in science and technology as a volunteer with the Boy Scouts of America.



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JOSHUA SPARLING

U.S. Army | University of Arizona | Juris Doctor



“The most important lesson I learned in the military is that our country is bigger than any one person, and that with teamwork, people can overcome any obstacle.”

With his grandfather, father, brother and sister all serving in the military, it wasn't until Joshua was attending community college that he decided to join the Army and be part of the effort to defend our freedom. After conversations with classmates in which he was defending his friends currently serving, Joshua decided to back up his friends and what he was saying by joining the service himself. The next day Joshua made a life-changing decision, putting college on hold and signing papers to become part of the 82nd Airborne Division.

During his tour of duty to Iraq in 2005, Joshua was involved in multiple firefights, and as a result was critically injured by an I.E.D., losing his leg, half his stomach, and receiving a permanent implant in his back--ending his military career. While recovering from his injuries, Joshua decided to finish what he started in college with the goal of becoming a lawyer.

A first generation college student, Joshua's goal is to affect maximum change in a position serving in the public sector, helping veterans solve issues deeper than those on the surface by representing them in Veterans Courts and lobbying for their just treatment.



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HALLI STEWART

U.S. Army | University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee | Ph.D, Urban Education



“Improving public education for our most delicate and marginalized students is paramount.”

At the age of 10, Halli became mesmerized by everything about the Army after visiting her sister and brother-in-law stationed in Fort Ord, CA. Waking up early and listening to cadence as soldiers ran in formation along with the courtesies and customs of the military, Halli was so intrigued that she joined the reserves at the age of 17. After getting a taste of military life, Halli quickly changed to an active duty enlistment, serving for five years as a combat medic. The Army offered Halli structure, routine and discipline that she desperately needed at the time.

During her service, Halli experienced a traumatic event, which taught her to persevere and ignited a passion to fight for equality and justice. While stationed at Fort Knox, Halli also became a Combat Lifesaver Instructor, sparking her love for teaching and learning. Service in the Army equipped Halli with the skills to quickly adapt and overcome obstacles. These characteristics and skills have made Halli's goal of becoming a professor in a teacher preparation program attainable.



FABIAN SUCHY

U.S. Army | Stanford University | Ph.D, Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine



“I want veterans to know that although the war overseas may taper to an end, I’m still by their side to fight the battle to recovery at home.”

In search of freedom, Fabian’s family emigrated from Czechoslovakia to provide a free life for themselves and their children. Having witnessed the destruction of liberty by the communist occupation in Eastern Europe, Fabian believes that since he is capable and willing to fight against repression of freedom, that it is his obligation to do so. Honored to be born an American citizen, it was an overwhelming sense of responsibility that guided Fabian towards enlistment at the age of 18.

As a combat medic, Fabian witnessed the need for regenerative medicine early in his career. Having had a brief clinical rotation at the Brooke Area Medical Center burn unit, it was while watching a skin graft surgery that Fabian first realized a major need in regenerative medicine to produce a relatively simple organ such as skin. After spending over two years in the Middle East, Fabian witnessed how advancements in body armor, emergency medicine and evacuation procedures have allowed soldiers and civilians to survive previously fatal forces. Although survivable, these conflicts result in lifelong disabilities including multiple amputations, traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord damage—wounds considered less common in other wars because they were often fatal.

Having learned the profound impact of “hope” during his 11 years of treating patients and witnessing injuries as a combat medic has forced his ambition to the field of research where he intends to deliver hope and finish the treatment he started years ago on the battlefield. Throughout his career, Fabian plans to improve the human condition through advances in regenerative medicine, ultimately aimed toward transplanting new or repairing damaged tissues and organs. Through the Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine PhD program at Stanford University, Fabian is receiving the foundation necessary to perform translational research and in ten years, hopes to become a faculty member in an academic setting.



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JOSHUA TARSKY

U.S. Army | Suffolk University | Juris Doctor



“I have come to believe that a person’s legacy - the value of a person’s life - is tied to the causes for which they fight.”

After a yearlong stint of being homeless, two trips in the Bering Sea as an Alaskan fisherman, three years traveling overseas, and a year and a half at community college, Josh enrolled at Yale University as a Theater major. Ten days after arriving on campus, Josh watched the twin towers fall, and after graduating he enlisted in the Army. As a medic in Afghanistan, Josh saw firsthand the devastating effects of war on the local population. On the ground, Josh realized that the war was a result, not just of insurgent groups enforcing their rule through violence and fear, but also a lack of education and infrastructure. In his view, the long-term solution was providing educational opportunities for women and children, and vocational school to create skilled laborers.

After his last deployment to Afghanistan, Josh realized that his calling was to become a dynamic educator. He matriculated to Harvard University where he earned his Master’s in Education, and motivated by his military service, took a position teaching English in one of the most needy school districts in Massachusetts. As an educator, he is convinced that every student, when provided a high quality education, is capable of achieving wondrous things; however, student achievement is also contingent upon competent teachers and administrators as well as sound government policies.

Now, Josh is working toward his law degree, taking night classes at Suffolk University while he continues to teach high school. His main goal is to close the educational achievement gap in American society, one of the great civil rights struggles that he sees as aligning with the De Oppresso Liber motto - to Free the Oppressed. He believes his experience with the military and public education, combined with a law degree, will grant him the know how to make lasting change at a policy level for an increasing number of children who need people to go that extra mile for them.



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ANN THOMPSON

U.S. Army | Princeton University | Master of Public Affairs



“I am only as effective as the people who surround me. Nothing can stand in the way of strong, cohesive teams.”

Ann joined the Army based on a deep-rooted desire to serve her country in a meaningful way. Her work in Afghanistan and at US Army Africa fueled an ambition to improve US assistance to fragile states. From her front row seat on issues ranging from the local Afghan economy to the Ebola crisis, Ann came to appreciate the relationship between security and development in US foreign policy. While stationed in Europe, she established an enduring partnership with an Italian unit to serve the local community and coordinated multinational training events.

Inspired by her work with foreign partners and her participation in the Marshall Center's Program on Terrorism and Security Studies, she looks forward to contributing to unified, bottom-up solutions in conflict-prone states. Now, driven by a desire to find effective interagency approaches to challenges of poverty, insecurity, and corruption, she is pursuing a Master of Public Affairs from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, specializing in international relations.



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MICHAEL WEIPERT

U.S. Navy | Texas A&M University | Doctor of Medicine



“My ambition in life is to ease suffering and help as many people as I possibly can.”

In the days after 9/11, Michael - already on track for medical school - told his wife he was joining the Army instead of going to medical school so he could deploy as quickly as possible. He left college with enough credits to graduate early, commissioned as an officer, became a helicopter/fixed wing pilot and deployed to Iraq three times.

Though proud of his service as a pilot, Michael felt that he could do more to help fellow service members. While deployed to Iraq, he often volunteered off-duty at a military hospital. One day, due to the number of injured personnel, a doctor asked Michael to assist with a surgery to amputate a patient's injured leg. As he stood in the operating room, Michael vowed on the spot to complete medical school and do everything possible to give back as a military doctor.

At Texas A&M University, Michael is now working toward his goal to become a Military Emergency Medicine Physician with the goal of providing casualty care for wounded troops on the front lines. He also hopes to give back serving on medical missions with the U.S. Mercy around the world.



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JOSEPH WHEATON

U.S. Army | Arizona State University | M.Ed, Secondary Education



“Whether it is maintaining classroom discipline, developing a positive community spirit, or fostering a positive attitude towards education, I’ve learned that success is rooted in the details.”

Stoic and a man of few words, Joseph Wheaton grew up in rural Maine where people understood one another with few words. After serving six deployments to the Middle East in five years, Joseph turned his attention to new challenges. After completing a law degree, Joseph determined that the lack of access to quality education for young children was the greatest threat to our nation. Believing that classrooms need leaders as teachers, Joseph embarked on a two-year Teach for America journey, where he realized that his experiences as a squad leader—including attention to detail, ability to overcome obstacles, and ability to direct focus and motivation to the end goal—prepared him well for leading a classroom.

Joseph has decided to further his teaching experience by pursuing a Master of Education while working full-time as a teacher, in order to address education policy issues and continue to bring education leadership to those who need it most. It is his hope that a greater understanding of education policy, combined with his law degree, will enable him to affect change on the policy level. Joseph believes it is his duty, as a leader in the classroom, to foster a culture of high expectations. This is step one in his mission to close the opportunity gap in our education system.



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DANIEL YBARRA

U.S. Navy | UCLA | Doctor of Medicine



“I want to motivate young people who don’t think they can make much out of their life. I want to be to them what my military mentors were to me.”

With great respect and admiration for his grandfather, a WWII Vet and POW, Daniel joined the military to serve as a Navy corpsman supporting the Marines. Although he struggled to finish high school in his earlier years, Daniel’s military mentors noticed in him an eagerness to learn under pressure. Their belief in him has since motivated Daniel to pursue a career as a physician.

At UCLA, he is now working toward completing his medical degree and a Masters in Public Health, guided by the lesson that he can have a true and profound impact on other people’s lives. In addition to his studies, he currently serves as a board member for VETNET, a UCLA veteran alumni affinity group. One of his responsibilities is to mentor undergraduate veterans who are interested in medicine. He is also conducting new research to determine the benefit of primary care services for homeless veterans.

Upon completion of his medical program, Daniel intends to serve in some capacity within the VA system. Following his residency, he also aspires to go back and teach at the community colleges he once attended, all with the goal of mentoring and motivating youth to make more out of their lives.