

# For love of COUNTRY

**M**any students enter their legal education with dreams of dedicating their lives to protecting the rights of United States citizens. A few have already served this commitment in a different, dramatic way.

## Balancing Service and Academics

For Army Staff Sgt. Tanya R. Mayes, balancing law school with military service has been a challenge, but has never been something that she has regretted. “I take serving my country very seriously and feel the sacrifices that I make are well worth it.” After spending three years as a full-time light-wheeled vehicle mechanic, she transferred to the reserves as a military police officer. After her first year of law school, she was activated and sent to the former Yugoslavia. During her deployment, Mayes participated in reconnaissance missions with

special forces, escorted famous USO acts, and observed United Nations and Judge Advocate General briefings to rebuild the legal and government systems in Bosnia.

For Air Force Captain Barry Brown and Navy Lieutenant Brendan Burke, their active duty assignment is attending law school at Stetson as part of law education programs offered to select military officers. “I was extremely fortunate to be selected for that program,” said Burke. “There is a six-year commitment after attending law school. ...In the Navy, I will have the opportunity to practice many different areas of law.”



Stetson's military students include (from left) Monique Parker, Eric Thiel, Steven Morgan, Susan St. John, Barry Brown, Tanya Mayes, William A. Wildhack III, Antonio Jimenez and Brendan Burke (inset).

## Unique Experiences

Capt. Brown's military career has taken him to Turkey and Kurdish territory in northern Iraq, but his most interesting experience was investigating an aircraft mishap in North Carolina. "A fighter jet had accidentally collided with about 20 ducks at night. I was the maintenance specialist working with doctors and pilots, and we had to write a huge report on what happened," said Brown. The incident required working with bird scientists from the Smithsonian museum to discover ways of preventing future bird-related airplane accidents.

Lt. Burke spent four years as a naval aviator flying Seahawk helicopters, which included deployments in a counter-narcotics operation in the Caribbean and East Pacific and participation in the post-Sept. 11 strikes in Afghanistan.

"The Navy helped me to grow up," said Petty Officer Second Class Antonio Jimenez, who served for five years. In addition to tours through the Persian Gulf, Malta, Spain, Jordan, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates while onboard the aircraft carrier the *USS John F. Kennedy*, he also earned his bachelor's degree by attending night courses when stationed in San Diego, Calif.

Serving as a military chaplain in the Navy reserves led Cmdr. William A. Wildhack III to reconsider a career in the law. "I have had frequent contact with lawyers and their clients, and have often acted as a mediator or advocate between people either in trouble or in need of assistance with the legal system. All along, I have been asked by others when I would expand my ministry by going to law school," said Cmdr. Wildhack.

## Preparation for Success

Many of the values instilled through military service prove to be advantageous during the course of a law school career. "The Navy taught me leadership skills and responsibility, as well as time management and being accountable for your actions," said Petty Officer Jimenez. "These are important attributes that a law student needs, and I feel that the Navy gave me that."

"The discipline factor was important, being on time, in uniform, looking good," said Navy Reserves Petty Officer Brinson. He compares these qualities to the professionalism expected in the legal profession.

The military also provided the students the opportunity to practice skills that had direct benefits in the classroom. "I have been researching regulations and

writing reports for work issues, people's performance and awards. That helped prepare me," said Capt. Brown.

Lt. Burke recognized similarities between Navy flight school and law school. "Before you even get to the aircraft, there is a briefing where instructors orally quiz students on everything from

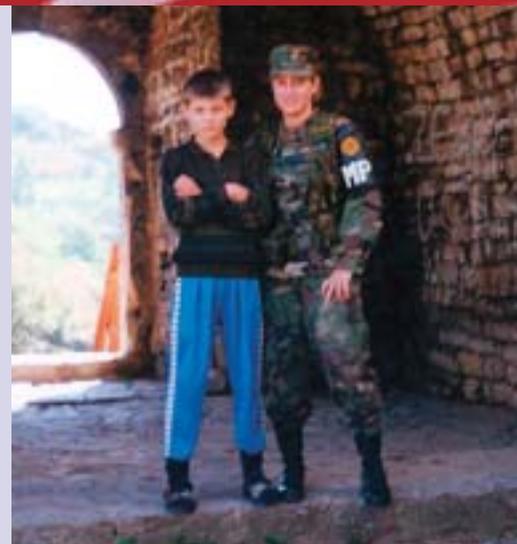
flight rules to emergency procedures to aircraft systems; always bringing in new twists that the students haven't considered," said Lt. Burke. Those students who couldn't answer all of the questions correctly were not allowed to fly that day. "It teaches you to think and speak well under pressure. I was lucky to find that when I got to Stetson, I was pretty comfortable right away getting called on in class to talk about cases."

## A rediscovered patriotism

"Every soldier learns a healthy respect for freedom and our way of life as soon as they step on foreign soil, but this was especially true for those of us overseas on Sept. 11," said Staff Sgt. Mayes, a second-year student from Panama City. "The personal and professional skills I have obtained from my military experiences have greatly enhanced my life and my appreciation for the freedoms we have in America."

Susan St. John, who served six years in the Army with stints in the Airborne corps and in Egypt, echoed this appreciation for American life. "No matter how hard exams are or how much debt I rack up, I am thankful that I am in the United States getting more education than most people around the world could ever dream of," said St. John, a second-year student.

Military experience also leads to an appreciation for the sacrifices of those fighting in uniform. "No military person wants to go to war, but once the country is there, it is important to support our troops, who are supporting our government and national interests," said Petty Officer Haynes Brinson.



Army Staff Sgt. Tanya Mayes was called from the reserves into active duty in Bosnia after her first year of law school. Above, Mayes stands with a young villager at the site of a burned-out castle.