

# THE BEACON



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Dear Parents, Students and Friends,

Military service. SST has hundreds of alumni who are serving our great country or who are serving as military spouses. These are graduates who make tremendous personal sacrifices each and every day. We don't hear enough about them. We don't know enough of their stories. Here are just a few:

- ***Matt Stonesifer '07, United States Army, Automotive Technologies***

I graduated in 2007 after attending the SST Automotive Technologies program my junior and senior year. I enlisted into the US Army as an 89D, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Technician. EOD technicians are essentially the military version of a bomb squad operator. We conduct procedures on IED (bombs) and conventional military munitions both within our borders and abroad, as well as support the State Department on critical personnel missions. After completing the Army's basic combat training, I attended the first phase of my EOD training at Redstone Arsenal in Alabama. Upon completion of Phase 1, I moved onto the joint service EOD School at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. Upon completing my EOD training, totaling 16 months, my first duty station was Yongsan Garrison, Seoul, South Korea. I spent 12 months serving in South Korea, most of this time was spent working on the DMZ clearing active mine fields for use in the development of training areas. Since 2009 I have been stationed at Fort Drum, New York. I have had the privilege to work at the last two inaugurations, as well as several missions for foreign dignitaries. I now serve as an EOD Team Leader, meaning I am the man down range taking actions on the hazards. I served in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012 in the western region of Kandahar Province. The skills and abilities, both technical and professional, which I learned at SST, have allowed me to excel in my career field that I love. I am currently training up for another tour of service in Afghanistan. (Matt left on November 14 for his second tour in Afghanistan and is stationed at Bagram Airfield).

- ***Brendan Podszus '08, United States Army, Biotechnology***

I am a 2012 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. I majored in German and French while attending USMA, however, I studied everything ranging from Constitutional and Military Law to Physics to Exercise Sciences. I was also fortunate enough while at West Point to have done a semester abroad at the Austrian Military Academy, participated in the Austrian Military Alpine Training and trained with the United States Marine Corps working with FA-18 fighter jets and conducting ethics research to name a few things. Upon graduating, I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army as an Aviation Officer. I recently finished Flight School upon which I earned my rating as an OH-58D Kiowa Warrior (aerial reconnaissance/light attack) helicopter pilot. I will be moving on to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina where I will join the 82nd Airborne Division to train and conduct missions in service of our great Nation.

- ***Jay Lennon '06, United States Army, Building Construction Technologies***

Ever since I was young, I have always had the desire to help others and my country. My grandfather and uncles had been part of the military when I was growing up and I knew it was something I wanted to do too. I made the decision to join after I graduated from Lakes Region Community College with a degree in Fire Science. I joined the Army as a reservist and left for basic training in May 2008. After completing my training, I was stationed in Keene, New Hampshire. It was shortly after I came home that I learned I would be deploying to Iraq with my new unit. I spent a year and a half being deployed. It was one of the greatest honors I have ever been able to take part in. I have had to make many personal sacrifices by joining the military but it has been completely worth it. It has given me so many opportunities that I never would have received before. I wouldn't trade this for the world. I'm glad I am able to help protect and serve my county.

- ***Kelly Winget Lennon '06, US Army Spouse, 3rd & 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher, Early Childhood Education***

It was during my sophomore year of college that my husband decided to join the military. I had many mixed emotions about the decision. I was, and still am, extremely proud of his choice to join the Army but I was very worried for his safety. At times, it has been very difficult being married to someone in the military. It was hard to be without him during his time at basic training and especially during his deployment. I had many sleepless nights missing him and worrying about his safety in Iraq. It was difficult during the holidays with him being so far away and also when something exciting would happen in my life. I would want to call him or celebrate with him, but communication to Iraq wasn't very easy. It is also exciting and rewarding to be married to someone in the military. It has given us many opportunities, such as giving us the ability to purchase a home of our own. I can't even begin to explain how proud I am that my husband made the selfless decision to protect our country. He makes endless sacrifices and puts himself in danger so that others are safe. Even though it can be hard at times, I wouldn't trade being married to a soldier for anything!

- ***Nick Stafford '13, United States Marine Corps, Animal & Plant Science***

I am now a United States Marine. I'm currently obtaining the skills and knowledge to become an MOS 1371 Combat Engineer. Once I learn the skills needed, I will be sent into the operated forces where I will put my job to use and learn even more about this vast MOS. Combat Engineers learn a lot to contribute to the fight. They are the ones who build buildings, fortifications, bunkers and fighting positions. They are also efficient in the use of explosives which are used for demolition and breaching. Alongside that, mine detecting and searching for IEDs is another part of being a Marine Combat Engineer. But before that, it is important to remember all the vital aspects of being a Marine by upholding the traditions and values that were instilled through boot camp where discipline is learned. Discipline to the Marine Corps is, "Instant willingness and obedience to orders, respect for authority, self-reliance and team work." I remember it well because we would have to scream it while being in the push up position - sweet memories. I believe that's where the Marine Corps differs from any other branch and makes them great on and off the battlefield. After boot camp I attended MCT (Marine Combat Training) where I was taught how to survive in combat. We did mock patrols, hikes, fired the M240B, threw live grenades, and did night firing with the night vision goggles - my personal favorite. That is all the training you do at boot camp, MCT and MOS school. But the true test is how efficient and disciplined you are when you go into the fleet and never forgetting that you are a Marine 24/7.

- ***John Grenier '06, United States Army, Welding Technologies***

In August, 2006 I completed basic training at Ft. Knox, Kentucky as a PFC. I then went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland for 21 weeks of welding school. I was then given orders to my first duty station - Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. I arrived in March, 2007 and was placed in a maintenance unit. In December, 2007 I was deployed to Iraq for 15 months. When I got back to Hawaii I was an SPC with a promotable status to SGT. At that time I was almost done with my initial four year enlistment. I then reenlisted and was moved to Ft. Drum, New York where I was promoted to SGT and became a squad leader. I finished my reenlistment contract with the active duty army and had 30 months left of my inactive ready reserve time. I wasn't ready to leave the Army completely so I reenlisted in the reserves out of Ft. Devens, Massachusetts. While in the reserves I got my first job as a civilian in Kensington, New Hampshire at Viking Welding where I worked for two years building aluminum fire rescue boats. I now work in Rochester at Laars Heating Systems Company as a TIG welder building commercial boilers. I will be finished with my eight-year enlistment contract in January, 2014. I have to credit the Seacoast School of Technology with getting me off on the right track to my future. It gave me the basic skills I needed to be successful in everything I've done up until now and into the rest of my career.

- ***Connor Sutherland '10, United States Marines Reserves, Marketing Technologies***

Being in the Marines is an outstanding privilege that no one besides your fellow Marines will ever understand. My biggest regret is not enlisting right after high school. Joining the military is absolutely one of the smartest career choices you can make, even if you only serve for four years. When you get out you have money to go to school and further your education and you have skills that you picked up in the service that companies will give preference to, even over someone who has a degree. Enlisting in the Marine Corps absolutely shaped who I will be for the rest of my life and I would not trade the title for anything in the world. The best advice I can give you if you are still in high school is, don't let anything choose a path for you, make your own decisions and do something that you will not only enjoy, but something that pushes you and gives you purpose.

- ***Richard Gagnier '05, United States Navy and Navy Reserves, Early Childhood Education***

After graduating SST and Exeter High School, I enlisted in the United States Navy. I served four years on active duty, serving one of those years in Afghanistan. After leaving active duty in 2009, I joined the Navy Reserves and have recently returned from another deployment to the Middle East. I worked as a Police Officer for the Town of East Kingston, New Hampshire from 2009-2010. After leaving that department, I was hired as a Federal Agent with the Department of Homeland Security, where I am currently employed. I now have my Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and am working on completing my Master's degree in Counter Terrorism Studies.

I attended the Seacoast School of Technology, Early Childhood Education (ECE) program during my junior and senior year of high school. The lessons I learned while enrolled in that program I carry with me to this day. I can say with a great deal of confidence that because of what I learned at SST, I am now a better father for it. For me, ECE impacted my life in ways I could never have predicted. My wife, Kara, (**Kara Hutchinson Gagnier '05, Early Childhood Education**) and I now have two children. It was important to us that we have both of our children attend the Wright Start Preschool at SST. My oldest, Riley, was enrolled for two years prior to going into the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and now my daughter, Kaylee, is enrolled in her first year at SST in the Wright Start Preschool. Having taught both Kara and me, Stacey Jordan & Carla Ranks continue to teach, however, now it is our children they are

educating. Carla and Stacey attended our wedding and, in fact, I spoke with both of them on several occasions over Skype while serving in Afghanistan. I have an immense amount of respect for both of them and the rest of the staff who continue to teach each and every day.

- ***Lillian Hayes Collins '07, United States Navy, Digital Media Arts and Marketing Technologies***

I am a Gunner's Mate, Second Class Petty Officer in the United States Navy and am currently stationed in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii as a crew member on the Navy's newest (and best) Destroyer, DDG 112, USS Michael Murphy. I am a plankowner, which means I am part of the 'original' crew of the ship. I have been a part of the crew since it was built in Bath, Maine, christened and then finally the commissioning in NYC! From NYC, we sailed through the Panama Canal, and had a couple of port visits to Barbados, Manzanillo, Mexico and San Diego. Finally, we homeported in Pearl Harbor just over a year ago.

To me, the best part about this ship is its namesake. Lt. (SEAL) Michael Murphy, he received the Medal of Honor for his actions in Afghanistan during Operation Red Wings on June 28, 2005. He was killed in action during a gun fight in the mountains, after he exposed himself in the middle of gun fire in an attempt to use a phone to call for help. On that day, ten other SEALs and eight Army Night Stalkers gave their lives. One of those SEALs was Senior Chief Information Systems Technician (SEAL) Daniel R. Healy, originally from Exeter, New Hampshire. The stories of heroism, selflessness, and bravery displayed by these men became the reason I joined the Navy and why I am so honored to be a part of this ship. Since being here, I have met the mothers and families of some of the men, and can't begin to explain how these experiences have humbled me and taught me about true patriotism.

Some people don't take their military jobs as seriously as I do, but I have made it a point to take pride in my work mainly because of who I am representing. My day to day work consists of anything from taking apart and cleaning weapons, doing maintenance on various weapons systems equipment, doing inventory of all ammunition on board, and my favorite - running the range during a gun shoot and teaching other shipmates about guns and marksmanship. My "primary" job on board is a 5"/62 Caliber Mk 45 Mod 4 Gun Technician, which means I take care of a 5' gun. "She" is my pride and joy - kind of like how a truck is to a man. I do all the maintenance, pre-fires and post-fires and operate the gun during live fire exercises. Other than that, I am part of Combat Guns division, which is in charge of all the weapons and ammunition on board, runs the gun qualifications program and plays a huge part in training and assisting the crew for standing watch and antiterrorism training efforts.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I signed up as a Gunner's Mate. I never thought I'd be on board a Navy Ship shooting guns, but here I am! SST taught me valuable life lessons, one of which has helped me the most - be open minded! Don't be nervous to try new things or learn something new. You can be good at something you never thought possible. Find people that inspire you to be a better person, and never give up. Military life is tough, but I am the 1% that signed that dotted line and even when I am feeling down and out, I keep reminding myself why I am here and who I am here for.

On behalf of everyone at SST we thank these men and women for their service.

Sincerely,

Margaret E. Callahan, Principal