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# Young Alumni Excellence Awards

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## Early Career Successes Lead to AOG Honor

*Five USAFA graduates have been named as this year's honorees for the Association of Graduates' Young Alumni Excellence Award. The award recognizes graduates for exceptional professional accomplishment, whether in military or civilian life. Nominees must be within 15 years of their graduation year to be considered.*

*A total of 22 young alums were nominated for the award this year.*

*Graduate years represented among the honorees were from 2004 to 2018.*

*This year's winners will be recognized at various regional Founders Day banquets in the spring. This is the fifth year for this AOG award and a total of 22 alumni have received the honor so far.*

### Maj. Brandon Dues '07



A member of the 2019-20 class of White House Fellows, Dues previously served as the military assistant to the deputy chairman of the Military Committee at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Headquarters, where he led a small team and served as the principal advisor to a U.S. three-star general officer. Dues helped

develop policy recommendations with 29 partner nations to support politically informed military advice to NATO's political leadership. In that capacity, he coordinated with international political and military stakeholders on a 10-year military strategy for NATO, in the defense of one billion citizens in the Euro-Atlantic region.

As a U-28 special operations pilot, Dues trained and commanded varied aircraft crews in combat to hunt the world's most wanted terrorists. With more than 1,300 combat flight hours across five deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, he has completed nearly 300 combat missions. On his most recent deployment, Dues led the stand-up of a new \$109 million U-28 special operations site in Iraq. He has held multiple leadership roles in both combat and training to develop future Air Force special operations leaders, including directing U-28 flight operations that resulted in 866 enemies killed in action.

Additionally, he was hand-picked as the aide-de-camp to support a three-star general officer in NATO, the world's most successful military alliance, and planned 50 international trips.

He was selected as Field Grade Officer of the Year and was a six-time FGO of the quarter, three times at the wing level. He will pin on lieutenant colonel later this year.

He has earned a master's in philosophy and doctorate in public policy analysis from the Pardee RAND Graduate School. He was also a distinguished graduate from Squadron Officer School.

His volunteer passions and community involvement maintain a domestic and international focus along the "teach a person to fish" model. He regularly volunteers with Habitat for Humanity, helping build more than 40 homes throughout his military service in the local community and in response to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. As a philanthropist, he's contributed to charities, including raising funds for more than 100 international cleft lip surgeries and funding more than 100 microloans in developing countries. He was awarded the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal for these efforts.

"Thank you to the AOG and those many outstanding examples in the Long Blue Line who inspire excellence," Dues says. "I am truly honored and humbled to receive this award, and I hope my small contributions will inspire others to serve and excel."

### Lt. Col. Anna Gunn-Golkin '05

Gunn-Golkin currently serves as the chief of staff of the Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office (AFRCO) in Washington, D.C. The office executes high-priority programs for the United States Air Force and the United States Space Force. In her capacity, Gunn-Golkin directly assists the program executive officer in leading all aspects of a \$40 billion portfolio that includes the B-21 bomber, the X-37 experimental



test vehicle and other high-priority programs. The Air Force has board-selected Lt. Col. Gunn-Golkin to serve as a test squadron commander in 2020.

Since USAFA graduation, she has earned a Master of Science degree in astronautical engineering as a distinguished graduate of the Air Force Institute of Technology. She

graduated from the United States Air Force Test Pilot School with a master's of science in flight test engineering. Gunn-Golkin is currently a doctoral student in the field of systems engineering.

Early in her career, as an Air Force launch controller in the 1st Air and Space Test Squadron at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Gunn-Golkin contributed significantly to the Minotaur rocket program that repurposed intercontinental ballistic missile rockets for space applications. She was also involved in the Missile Defense Agency's kinetic energy interceptor.

After graduating from the Air Force Test Pilot School, Gunn-Golkin served in two test squadrons involved in the highest-priority programs in the Air Force. Her commanders quickly elevated her to chief engineer and assistant director of operations. She led and supported first flights for a variety of test aircraft. She served as test crew for the HH-60 Pavahawk helicopter, F-18F Super Hornet and F-16 Fighting Falcon.

She served three years as the Wing's Chief Flight Test Engineer, earning two MAJCOM-level aircrew Outstanding Performer awards.

Gunn-Golkin then returned to United States Air Force Academy as an instructor in the Department of Astronautics. For two years she taught astronautics, rocket propulsion and small unmanned aerial systems airmanship. While an instructor, she also supported FalconSat 3, FalconSat 6 and FalconSat 8 operations. In addition, Gunn-Golkin volunteered for and served as the officer-in-charge of the Cadet Rock Climbing team.

Next, Gunn-Golkin completed a Strategic Policy Fellowship in 2018, with rotations in the secretary of the Air Force's Executive Action Group and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. At NASA's Human Operations and Exploration Mission Directorate, Gunn-Golkin helped shape national space policy.

Away from her work, Gunn-Golkin has a record of stellar community service. As a member of the Experimental Aircraft Association, she has been involved in the Young Eagles program. She has donated time, her airplane aviation gas and her enthusiasm to inspire young people about flight.

From 2007 to 2017, Gunn-Golkin served as a Civil Air Patrol instructor during assignments in California, Colorado and

Nevada. Gunn-Golkin also has been involved in the Virginia Women in Aviation Initiative to introduce young women and girls to flight.

Gunn-Golkin currently serves as a volunteer at the Air & Space Museum. She also has been a leader in the Space Generation Fusion Forum, bringing together students and young professionals from the international community to address space topics. In addition, she has contributed to the Future City Competition, which involves junior high school students building a city via a computer simulation.

#### Lt. Col. Miriam Krieger '04



Currently an assistant professor of political science at USAFA, Krieger leads the International Relations division, overseeing the instruction of 685 cadets in 14 classes and supervising six instructors. She is also co-editing the ninth edition of the department's American Defense Policy book and acts as a mentor and selection committee member for the Academy's

graduate scholarship program.

Following USAFA graduation, Krieger continued her education as a Marshall Scholar in the United Kingdom. She earned her first master's degree in global politics from the London School of Economics, and her second master's degree in conflict security and development from King's College London. She also completed internships at the U.S. Department of State, where she worked on arms transfers to the Middle East, and at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, where she contributed to their 2006 Military Balance publication.

Krieger then earned her pilot wings by completing Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training and was selected to fly the F-16. She quickly upgraded to mission commander, and led the 11 enlisted members of the squadron's Aircrew Flight Equipment shop through a rigorous inspection and a squadron deployment to the Republic of Korea. Her leadership earned her recognition as the squadron and wing Company Grade Officer of the Year.

Krieger was selected as one of two members of the second class of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's Captains Prestigious Ph.D. Fellowship, a program that creates strategic thinkers and joint leaders by sending high-performing captains to a top-tier civilian university to complete a doctorate in strategic studies. She completed a doctorate in international relations at Georgetown University (with a third master's degree along the way). She researched and co-wrote a report for the chief of staff of the Air Force on why female officers separate from the

Air Force at twice the rate of their male peers. The report led to some of the current personnel process changes — such as the Career Intermission Program — and earned Krieger the 2015 General Wilma Vought Visionary Leadership award.

Krieger then became a special assistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She led the chairman's internal think tank, which is responsible for integrating information and products from across the Joint Staff to inform policy decisions. She authored the chairman's policy memos on the integration of women into combat roles and transgender persons into the military. She also served on the leadership team of the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum, a nonprofit volunteer organization that inspires innovation in national security by empowering junior practitioners.

Krieger serves her community by sitting on the Marshall Scholarship board of directors and fundraising for the American Cancer Society, a disease she has recently survived.

"I'm honored to receive this award and deeply grateful to the Air Force Academy for the extraordinary opportunities it provided to challenge myself, grow as a leader and scholar, and ultimately launch me on this amazing career," Krieger says. "I have always been awed by the Academy and feel profoundly lucky to be able to give back to this institution and future members of the Long Blue Line."

#### Maj. Caitlin Reilly '07



Reilly is a U-28A evaluator pilot and executive officer to the director of operations Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida. She supports the director on implementation and direction of operational command policy for AFSOC's worldwide special operations units, including 20,000 personnel, 271 aircraft and \$17 billion in assets.

Upon graduation from USAFA, Reilly attended pilot training and was assigned to the C-130. She flew the C-130H at Pope Field, North Carolina, for three years, deploying twice in support of Operation New Dawn and Operation Enduring Freedom. In addition to leading the medical evacuation of 59 personnel, she and her crew were the 2011 Air Mobility Command Cheney Award nominees for overcoming an engine failure and inclement weather to deliver the first humanitarian supplies into Yemen following a terrorist attack that left 200 people wounded.

In 2013, she joined AFSOC and moved to Hurlburt Field to fly the U-28A. Reilly has served in leadership roles as the

commander, operations officer and assistant operations officer in six of her seven U-28 deployments.

As the operations officer and U-28A aircraft commander for the 319th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron (ESOS) in Western Africa in 2017, Reilly and her team supported an elite joint task force across the African continent for a high-visibility, POTUS-level mission. After planning the first trans-Sahara U-28A crossing, she led her team in further contingency planning after last-minute country clearance changes forced rerouting operations to a contingency country on a different continent. The next day, Reilly and her crew flew two hours over the Mediterranean in their single-engine aircraft with no divers and no personnel recovery options to conduct the first-ever U-28A intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) mission over an undisclosed country in Northern Africa.

In 2018, Reilly was hand-picked to be the mission commander for a contingency deployment to SOUTHCOM. There were only three days between the U-28A landing in country and the night of the possible attack for Reilly and her team of nine airmen to work with the small special operations team on the ground to find and neutralize the threats in a country that had never used ISR for a contingency mission. Over the next two weeks, Reilly served as the mission commander and the acting J2, J3 targeting team collections manager, scheduler and ISR tactical coordinator in order to effectively utilize the U-28A.

On her last combat deployment with the 319 SOS, Reilly served as the 319 ESOS squadron commander in Afghanistan.

Reilly and her crew, DRACO 42, won the National Aeronautics Association Mackay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of 2018. In her four years at the 319th SOS, Reilly's combat leadership and airmanship protected more than 8,750 U.S. and coalition troops on direct action or kinetic strike missions resulting in 286 detainees and the elimination of 900 enemy combatants, including 68 high-value individuals.

Her actions over the past two years of deployments earned her the 2019 Jabara Award for Airmanship.

In addition to her operational exploits, during a deployment to the Philippines she gathered and delivered toys on Christmas to the Zamboanga Orphanage. She has also volunteered with Habitat for Humanity.

She is most passionate about generating interest in aviation among young adults, so she has spent much of her leave speaking to high school students in rural areas about aviation and the Air Force. She is involved with Women in Aviation International and works with the local Northwest Florida chapter to promote STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) to young women.



## Lt. Col. Wesley Nyles Spurlock III '04



Currently the 344th Air Refueling squadron commander at McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas, Spurlock is responsible for the organization training and equipping of 101 members from 20 different legacy platforms who will stand up the first KC-46 squadron. Spurlock is responsible for creating the tactics, techniques and procedures to not only provide “Global Reach Global Power” but also serve as a valuable node in the combat cloud. Spurlock holds a master’s of business administration from Mississippi State University, as well as a master’s in public administration from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government through the Air Force Fellowship program.

Spurlock has been awarded Company Grade Officer of the Year three separate years at the group, wing and MAJCOM levels, to include being No. 1 of more than 4,000 as Air Mobility Command’s Company Grade Officer of the Year in 2011.


Spurlock was also awarded the Airlift Tanker Association’s Young Leadership Award, California’s Air Force Association

(AFA) Company Grade Officer of the Year and the General Ellis Trophy for the top KC-10 crew at the 2011 AMC Rodeo. Additionally, in pilot training at Columbus Air Force Base he was awarded the AFA award for his work following Hurricane Katrina. Spurlock organized a team of airmen, traveled to the devastated Gulf Coast Region and helped families rebuild their storm-ravaged homes.

Spurlock is the former military aide to both presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. In this capacity, he was the ceremonial aide to the president for all events up to and including presenting the Medal of Honor.

In addition, he acted as the White House Military Office director of operations for all matters affecting presidential support while traveling. In this role, he personally supported the pope’s visit to the U.S., led operations for the 2017 inauguration, and commanded the 2017 mission to repatriate the U.S. prisoner in Egypt, Aya Hijazi.

Most importantly, Spurlock was entrusted to carry the “nuclear football” for the president and personally assist him if needed to execute continuity of government and nuclear command and control.

Spurlock volunteers by sponsoring, advocating and supporting the Gold Star Families program and Wreaths Across America. 



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