



**MAJ. SYED  
SAAD JAVAID '08, Ph.D.**

By David Bitton

**T**he U.S. Air Force Academy gave Pakistan Air Force Squadron Leader Syed Javaid '08 the tenacity to turn failure into success.

Now he's teaching future leaders of a key American ally in Central Asia how to persevere through challenges.

Dr. Javaid earned the Association of Graduates' Young Alumni Excellence Award for his efforts as an engineering professor at the Pakistan Air Force Academy in the northwestern city of Risalpur.

"USAFA instilled the belief that I can achieve anything I set my mind to," Dr. Javaid says.

Before coming to Colorado Springs through an exchange program, Dr. Javaid only knew success as a top cadet at the Pakistani air force academy. The rigor of USAFA's physical training and flight programs hit him like a haymaker.

"It was surprising how challenging it was," Dr. Javaid says. "Everyone has their kryptonite and mine was the physical fitness test."

In Pakistan, cadets trained for chin-ups, using a completely different muscle group than the pull-ups required at USAFA.

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He failed the physical fitness test during basic cadet training and again his first semester. But he kept working and went from zero to more than a dozen pull-ups. He also struggled in the cockpit, but he trained his mind as he rebuilt his body. Parachute training was another hurdle he had to surmount

after washing out on his first attempt. It wasn't easy, but he tamed stick, rudder and silk canopy with dedication and hard work.

"I think that's one thing that I've never had in my life before, where that utmost belief that if you put in the effort, it will come," he says during a videoconference interview from Pakistan. "You will make it happen."

Dr. Javaid had to make things happen quickly after he was commissioned as a lieutenant, quickly heading to forward bases supporting the Global War on Terror and managing flight lines.

He later served as a liaison officer between Pakistani and U.S. forces during his nation's first participation in Red Flag exercises at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. Dr. Javaid also helped Pakistan navigate through comprehensive upgrades to its fleet of F-16 fighters.

After his USAFA graduation, Dr. Javaid was up for any challenge, winning a Fulbright scholarship that helped him earn a doctorate degree at Georgia Tech's famed engineering school.

Dr. Javaid credits every success to those early failures at USAFA.

"The core belief that USAFA instilled in their graduates — being able to achieve anything — I've never seen it happen anywhere else," he says.

As a squadron leader, a rank equivalent to major, Dr. Javaid was selected to teach at Pakistan's academy based on his prowess as an engineer and his demonstrated skill in the cockpit. He's the only member of the Long Blue Line on the faculty and he's worked to inject the best of USAFA's culture into the school.

He wants every Pakistani cadet to become a mentor, like the cadets he leaned

on during tough days at USAFA. He wants to instill honor and build leaders of character who can pilot Pakistan toward a bright future. For Dr. Javaid, being an agent of change sometimes seems as difficult as USAFA's pull-ups.

"I learned that pretty quickly that I'm going to start small; it's not going to be big changes," he says. "But if I can make a difference in a few people's lives, that would mean the world to them."

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The best ideas are often borrowed. Dr. Javaid is helping Pakistan's academy build a program modeled after the National Character and Leadership Symposium.

His push to improve Pakistan's air force has earned Dr. Javaid accolades, including three Chief of the Air Staff commendations.

The one thing he wants to weave into the fabric of Pakistan's military is something every member of the Long Blue Line experienced on their first day when they stood in the footprints. Like USAFA's cadets, Pakistan's airmen need rigor to build resilience and tough lessons to build tenacity.

It's that USAFA haymaker that hit Dr. Javaid and changed his life.

"It was surprisingly challenging. I did not expect it to be that hard. But I think that's what pretty much everyone experiences quickly," he says. "That's how it's designed to be."



## EMMA PRZYBYSŁAWSKI '10

By Bryan Grossman

Following her freshman year, Emma Przybyslawski '10 came to the conclusion that the U.S. Air Force Academy wasn't for her, so she hung up her uniform and transferred to the University of Oklahoma.

But resistance was futile.

"After 90 days [at OU], I started the process to reapply to the Academy," Przybyslawski says. "I come from an Air Force Academy family. My dad is a 1976 grad. I have pictures from when I was a kid sitting on the class wall. The Academy has just always been part of my life since the very beginning."

Przybyslawski's grandfather also served, taking part in the bombing of Dresden, Germany, during World War II.

"I feel like I spent my life surrounded by these incredible humans and it was important to me to do something incredible," she says.

Przybyslawski return to USAFA and ultimately commissioned, beginning her career as a special operations intelligence officer.

In 2015, she earned a Bronze Star in Iraq for her work with the kinetic drone program. Przybyslawski collaborated with U.S., Canadian and Australian special operations forces, navigating one of the most challenging combat environments on Earth. Her orchestration of drone strikes had a substantial impact on enemy capabilities and supported allied ground operations.

She tells *Checkpoints* this was the most professionally satisfying period of her active-duty career.

"From snout to tail, the entire operation ... required everything I had in me," she explains, "and all of it was from the Academy — keeping my nose to the grindstone and just outworking everyone."

Przybyslawski transitioned from active duty to leadership roles in the civilian technology sector in 2016. She supported the U.S. Air Force and Space Force at Gartner Inc. beginning in 2018 and achieved the highest sales across all verticals.

As a CEO and co-founder, Przybyslawski has established and developed Strike Solutions, an edge solutions integration company focused on delivering meaningful products to defense customers. Strike has secured several Department of Defense and commercial contracts to support surveillance missions. She is also the owner of Dare Venture Group and Delta Technical and Engineering Services, both focused on serving government customers with services-based support.

Przybyslawski is the Association of Graduates' first board director from the 2010+ decade. She has been elected twice to the board. In this role, she advocates for inclusive membership policies, ensuring all graduates have a voice in the Association's affairs. She supported the AOG's move in 2022 to no-cost membership for all graduates, which led to thousands of graduates joining. Plus, she played a key role in reconfiguring the awards process to amplify graduates' accomplishments, allowing Academy alumni stories to be shared more broadly.

"I feel like I've left the board in a better place than when I initially joined," she tells *Checkpoints*. "It felt like I was the youngest person by light years, and now we have such amazing representation across a diverse graduate community, which is exactly what we need. My role is to advocate for the grads and make sure that the Association itself is aligned and best poised to serve that community. So, it's a pretty simple mission. We don't always get it right, but we've got some

incredible people on the board who are trying to help improve it every single day."

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As for her leadership style, Przybyslawski says "it's all about surrounding myself with people I trust who I know are of high competency and letting them run and do their things. My leadership style is to block and tackle for them, period dot. I never want to be the smartest person in the room. And I think that empowering those around you is one of the greatest joys in life."

Przybyslawski tells *Checkpoints* the YAEA recognition is humbling.

"It's eyewatering to be thought of as someone that can be recognized for representing the Academy the way that I think we all want it to be represented," she says.

Przybyslawski deflects praise, crediting her family for her success.

"I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my family," she says. "They've carried me through so many lows and highs. Going to the Air Force Academy — I know it seems like a minor thing, but as an 18-year-old kid, it's so hard. And there were not a lot of girls at the time, and so that was hard. There were just so many hard things about that school and then what I went and did after that — I thank God. I would be nowhere without my family, encouraging me to do the hard things."





**MAJ. LAURA  
JONES '11**

By Bryan Grossman

**N**early every U.S. Air Force Academy graduate, if asked, would say they've seen tough times. For Maj. Laura Jones '11, life's most difficult challenge came after her graduation day.

While on leave in 2014, Jones was heading home from San Antonio just days into the new year.

"I was driving back at around 8 p.m. from San Antonio International Airport to Laughlin," she tells *Checkpoints*. "I was about halfway home on a dark rural highway — I had my cruise control set at 75 mph, which was the limit. There's one other car on the road like two legs ahead of me and their front right tire blew. They smashed right into my driver side."

A helicopter airlifted Jones to San Antonio Military Medical Center where doctors began working on her broken jaw, shattered femur and wrists, her lacerated kidney and spleen, her bruised lungs and the glass in her eyes.

"Events like this kind of reveal who you are," Jones says. "Your values come out, and I think what I went through at the Academy and then in the Air Force helped me through that."

After the accident, the instructor pilot found herself surrounded by those saying she'd never fly again, let alone walk. But just months later, Jones was back in the cockpit. She even declined to request a push-up waiver, performing the exercise on her knuckles due to losing mobility in her wrists.

"I've been completing PT tests from then on without limitations," she says. "Yeah, I look silly sometimes; people are like, 'What the hell is she doing?' You know, it's just one of those things."

Not all of Jones's challenges have been life-or-death, but she's faced each with the same tenacity.

"I went to the Academy specifically with a goal of taking advantage of foreign travel programs," she says. "And I wanted to play rugby, and I wanted to get a pilot slot. I managed to do all three things."

As for travel, Jones took part in a prestigious foreign exchange program with France's Ecole de l'Air, earning her jump wings, and she was part of an exchange program with the Polish Air Force Academy. She also did AFRICOM-sponsored research in Washington, D.C., and in Senegal; became a first assignment instructor pilot for the T-6; deployed as liaison officer to the French Air Force in Djibouti; transitioned to Air Force Special Operations Command to fly the CV-22 Osprey (landing one on a nuclear aircraft carrier); and stood up the new Osprey squadron in Japan.

Jones also authored a research proposal for RAND's Project Air Force. Ranking third out of 24 by the vice chief of staff, her proposal was selected for funding. She is also the first officer to be selected for AFSOC's Ph.D. fellowship.

She is enrolled at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Boston.

Jones's dedication to her craft goes beyond her studies — she has been a part of the Irregular Warfare Initiative for three years and served on the board of directors when the organization officially incorporated as a nonprofit. Jones is a host for the IWI podcast, personally producing or directing 35 episodes featuring senior military leaders, former members of Congress, leading

scholars and experts in their fields. She grew the podcast from 5,000 downloads to almost 50,000 downloads a month. Jones also spearheaded a partnership with Foreign Policy magazine, giving IWI access to their million-plus subscribers.

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***"Go with the flow and appreciate  
the little things."***

So, what advice would a highly accomplished Jones offer herself on the day of her Academy graduation?

"It's cliché, but it goes fast. So even when it's a grind, enjoy the little moments," she says. "I used to tell my T-6 students when they were getting dragged down, 'Hey, man, look outside. Look at the clouds. You're flying an Air Force airplane right now. You're getting paid to do it.' So just having that mentality from day one — go with the flow and appreciate the little things."

"And also ask questions. A lot of times asking questions as a young officer is intimidating. But there's a time and place for questions. It's important to understand which topics you're ignorant of, and to get better at them. The more you ask questions and fess up early when you don't understand something, the quicker you're going to get smart and be a benefit to the organization. So, asking questions is good."