

YOUNG ALUMNI EXCELLENCE AWARD

LT. COL. MEGAN BILES '10



By Sam Hastings

Lt. Col. Megan Biles '10 didn't grow up dreaming of a military career. Raised in Gresham, Oregon, she says her early ambitions revolved around competitive soccer and a desire to teach high school English. A recruiting call from the U.S. Air Force Academy changed her trajectory.

"I didn't come from a military background," she says. "During my campus visit, I was drawn to the challenge, sense of purpose and strong community."

That sense of purpose led her to accept an appointment to the Academy, where she knew her limits would be tested.

"My Christian faith played a big role," Col. Biles says. "I saw it as a vocational calling — something that mattered beyond just a career."

Then-cadet Biles arrived at USAFA ready to play intercollegiate soccer but eventually stepped away from the team to explore new athletic challenges, including the marathon and triathlon clubs. These clubs pushed her outside her comfort zone, taught her to stay steady under pressure, and encouraged her to pursue goals like completing the Ironman Wisconsin and, during a foreign immersion in China, running the Great Wall Marathon.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing. Biles says she didn't have a strong math background. After a tough conversation with her academic adviser about whether the Academy was the right fit, she decided to persevere.

That defining moment helped her recover academically and thrive. Her political science studies took her to West Point to represent USAFA at a conference, and

to Vietnam for an international relations immersion.

On the military side, she participated in jump and powered flight training and served as summer cadet group commander for Combat Survival Training, helping reinstate the program after a long hiatus.

The Academy, she says, taught her to never quit, to rely on a strong support system, to keep showing up when things are hard and to take chances even when the odds aren't in her favor.

After graduation, she earned her wings and flew the C-146A, deploying six times across multiple U.S. combatant commands. One of her assignments came during a volatile period in Burkina Faso, where she served as special operations forces liaison officer to the U.S. Embassy. The mission had a clear purpose, making her work incredibly fulfilling.

As her career took off, she was selected as aide-de-camp to the vice commander of U.S. Special Operations Command at the Pentagon, then served as a legislative liaison and research contributor at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. She also worked with the chief of staff and secretary of the Air Force, conducting strategic analysis and helping guide the Department of the Air Force reoptimization effort.

Outside the Air Force, she was a fellow and director of fellows for the Irregular Warfare Initiative. She was also a Next-Gen National Security Fellow with the Center for a New American Security.

She continued learning, earning master's degrees from Georgetown University and the School of Advanced Air and Space

Studies. Now a Ph.D. candidate in the SAASS follow-on program, she's studying military integration with allies and partners to help shape future policy.

Throughout her career, Col. Biles has combined strategic thinking with a commitment to service. Her efforts as co-chair of the Air Force's Barrier Analysis Working Group helped expand aviation readiness by allowing more flexibility to fly while pregnant.

"We approached everything through the lens of readiness, risk, resources, retention and recruitment," she says. "Too many existing policies were outdated and didn't reflect the modern force or the realities of those serving."

These experiences taught her to conduct analysis, frame issues for greater impact and navigate complex institutions — skills that continue to serve her today.

"I try to lead with honesty, humility and a willingness to roll up my sleeves and do the hard work alongside the team," Col. Biles says.

She was surprised and humbled to be selected for the Young Alumni Excellence Award.

"I didn't even know I'd been nominated," she says. "I feel grateful, blessed and, most of all, thankful for the people in my corner who've supported and uplifted me along the way."

For Col. Biles, being part of the Long Blue Line means you are never alone; you are part of something bigger.

"I'm thankful for the many mentors I've gained throughout my journey," she says. "You truly can go further together." 