



# AFTER HARVARD: CONSIDERING MILITARY SERVICE

*Undergraduate Resource Series*

Mignone Center for Career Success | 54 Dunster Street

Harvard University | Faculty of Arts and Sciences

[mcs@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:mcs@fas.harvard.edu) | [careerservices.fas.harvard.edu](https://careerservices.fas.harvard.edu)



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Mignone Center for Career Success  
Harvard University Faculty of Arts & Sciences  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
[mcs@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:mcs@fas.harvard.edu)  
[careerservices.fas.harvard.edu](https://careerservices.fas.harvard.edu)

As veterans of the military who are now part of the Harvard community, we know how daunting the decision to join America's armed forces can be. This is especially true at a place like Harvard where military service is the path less traveled. We know the questions are numerous. What is life in the military really like? Should I join the Army or the Marine Corps? What will it mean for my future career if I spend four years in the military after my time at Harvard? Who should I talk to about this decision? These are just some of the countless questions that people who have never served and people who have never been to Harvard just have a tough time helping you answer.

This booklet was created by a group of Harvard graduate students, many of whom attended Harvard College, served in the US military, and came back to campus to attend one of Harvard's various graduate programs. In it, they seek to provide you with answers to the questions and access to the resources that they wish they had known about when they were in your shoes. This *is not* recruiting material. Rather, it is meant to be straight talk about military service and what it means to serve in the military after attending a school like Harvard.

We hope that this is a great starting point as you begin to consider whether military service is the right next step for you. This is not a decision you have to make on your own—Harvard has countless resources including the Mignone Center for Career Success, several veterans' groups at Harvard's graduate schools, and numerous veterans' alumni groups. The military is not for everyone, but for some, there is no better next step.

Jonas Akins

Harvard College, 2001 and Harvard Business School, 2012

US Navy Veteran

Eric Malmstrom

Harvard Business School and Kennedy School, 2012

US Army Veteran

Robert Wheeler

Harvard College, 2005 and Harvard Business School, 2011

US Army Veteran

## **I. So, you're thinking of joining the military!**

Tens of thousands of Harvard men and women have served their country in the military, from the earliest days of Harvard College through to the present. Over a thousand have died in the service of the Nation. It is an honorable calling, a vital part of our national security, and a career that will challenge you in ways that you can only begin to imagine. You will be responsible for carrying out missions of the utmost importance, put in charge of equipment worth millions of dollars, and, most importantly, entrusted with the lives of the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen serving with you. This booklet is designed to outline some of the basics regarding military service and to provide you with resources that you can tap as you try to decide if the military is the right place for you. The Mignone Center for Career Success, House tutors, alumni, and veterans enrolled at the College and at Harvard's graduate schools are also valuable resources that you should connect with as you start this process.

Serving in the United States military is not for everybody. But for the right person, there is no better place to spend the next three years or the next 30 years after graduation. Putting the time in now to determine if the military is the right next step for you is crucial to being happy with your eventual decision whatever it may be. Picking up this booklet was the first step. It will be worth it.

## **II. The US Military Services**

There are five primary military services fielded by the United States of America: The Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps. Each service has Active-duty, Reserve, and National Guard components. Active-duty service members are those who serve as "full-time" soldiers, airmen, sailors, marines, and coast guardsmen. Although there are subtle distinctions, the Reserves and National Guard allow people to serve in a "part-time" capacity while maintaining a civilian career. While there are opportunities for Harvard graduates in the National Guard and Reserves, this booklet will focus primarily on the active-duty forces. If you are interested in joining the National Guard or Reserves, the information in this booklet will still be very relevant, but there are additional considerations that you should talk through with a recruiter from your chosen branch of service.

This section briefly describes each of the services and highlights the types of missions for which each is responsible. The goal of this section is to give the prospective service member an understanding of the types of missions he or she may be undertaking within each of the distinct branches of the US Armed Services.

### **Air Force**

The Air Force is the aerial warfare branch of the US Armed Forces. Its stated mission is "to fly, fight, and win... airpower anytime, anywhere." The Air Force is the youngest branch of the US Military, being established by the National Security Act of 1947. The US Air Force maintains the largest and most technologically advanced air fleet in the world, and includes manned aircraft, unmanned aerial combat vehicles, and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In contributing to the defense of the United States, the Air Force has six core missions:

- Air and Space Superiority
- Global Presence
- Rapid Global Mobility
- Precision Engagement
- Information Superiority
- Agile Combat Support

Visit [www.airforce.com](http://www.airforce.com) for further information.

## **Army**

The Army is the United States' primary force responsible for land-based military operations. The modern Army traces its roots back to the Continental Army that fought the British for US independence and was formed in 1775. The Army is the oldest and largest of the US military's armed services and counts over 1.1 million soldiers as members of its ranks.

The Army is organized into "branches" of service that describe the primary missions of the soldiers within that organization. Incoming officers are assigned to one of the Army's branches upon their commissioning as an officer. Examples of Army branches include:

- |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Air Defense Artillery | • Military Intelligence |
| • Armor                 | • Military Police       |
| • Aviation              | • Ordnance              |
| • Chemical              | • Quartermaster         |
| • Civil Affairs         | • Signal Corps          |
| • Engineer              | • Special Forces        |
| • Field Artillery       | • Transportation        |
| • Financial Management  |                         |

In addition to these basic branches, specialized branches exist for the Army's professionals in the legal and medical fields as well as the religious vocations. For more information on the US Army, visit [www.goarmy.com](http://www.goarmy.com).

## **Coast Guard**

The Coast Guard was established under Alexander Hamilton in August of 1790 and is the oldest of the US military's seagoing services. The Coast Guard is the smallest of the United States' five military services.

The Coast Guard operates a fleet of cutters (large ships), aircraft, and smaller boats to fulfill its three basic roles in the national defense:

- Maritime Safety
- Maritime Security
- Maritime Stewardship

The 11 official missions of the Coast Guard are:

- Ports, Waterways, and Coastal Security
- Drug Interdiction
- Aids to Navigation
- Search & Rescue
- Living Marine Resources
- Marine Safety
- Defense Readiness
- Migrant Interdiction
- Marine Environmental Protection
- Ice Operations
- Other Law Enforcement

For more information on the US Coast Guard, visit [www.gocoastguard.com](http://www.gocoastguard.com).

## **Marine Corps**

The Marine Corps traces its history to November of 1775 when two battalions of Continental Marines were formed at Tun Tavern in Philadelphia. Officially, the Marines are responsible for providing power projection from the sea, using the mobility of the Navy to deliver ground troops to conflict zones rapidly. In practice, the Marine Corps conducts many ground-based combat missions in addition to this power projection role. Most people consider the Marines the “most military” of the armed services with regard to its culture. The Marine Corps, perhaps even more so than the services, imbues a deep sense of camaraderie between its members.

The Marine Corps has statutory responsibility for three primary areas:

- The seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and other land operations to support naval campaigns.
- The development of tactics, technique, and equipment used by amphibious landing forces.
- Such other duties as the President may direct.

The third of these responsibilities provides the basis for the use of the Marine Corps in expeditionary missions that are not necessarily connected with naval operations. Such missions make up a significant portion of the Marine Corps’ historical and current campaigns.

Every Marine is “a rifleman first,” and the Corps is largely an infantry-focused fighting force. The Marine Corps employs artillery, aircraft, intelligence operations as well as a variety of support functions in order to provide a self-contained fighting force capable of combined-arms operations.

If you are interested in learning more about the Marine Corps, visit [www.marines.com/](http://www.marines.com/).

## **Navy**

The US Navy is one of the largest in the world. The Navy’s fleet consists of ships (composed of aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, submarines, and others) as well as aircraft.

Manning this fleet are sailors who execute the Navy's mission to, "maintain, train, and equip combat-ready Naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas." To do this, the Navy recognizes three distinct areas of responsibility:

- The preparation of naval forces necessary for the effective prosecution of war.
- The maintenance of naval aviation, including land-based naval aviation, air transport essential for naval operations and all air weapons and air techniques involved in operations and activities of the Navy.
- The development of aircraft, weapons, tactics, technique, organization, and equipment of naval combat and service elements.

As a potential officer in the Navy, there is a vast array of fields in which you may serve. Some of these include: surface warfare, submarine warfare, nuclear power, command and control, special operations (Navy SEALs), aviation, logistics, information technology, healthcare, intelligence, and personnel.

For more information on the US Navy, visit [www.navy.com/](http://www.navy.com/).

### **III. Becoming a Military Officer**

Each branch of the US Armed Forces makes a distinction between *commissioned officers* and *enlisted service members*. At the most basic level, commissioned officers are the "leaders" in the military. They generally receive some training in a particular technical field, but the majority of their training and responsibility is in leadership and management skills. Each unit in the US military is led by a commissioned officer and the officer is responsible for everything that his or her unit accomplishes or fails to accomplish. In order to join the commissioned officer ranks, an individual generally must have earned at least a bachelor's degree from a recognized university and have undergone specialized training as directed by the military branch in which he or she will be serving. The officer derives authority directly from the President of the United States of America and, as such, holds a *commission* charging him or her with the duties and responsibilities of a specific office or position.

In contrast, enlisted members of the military are generally trained in a particular technical or tactical field. During the early years of their career, they are responsible for mastering that field and then mentoring younger enlisted members in their mastery of the task. While some enlisted members are well educated, the threshold educational level is lower and officers are, by and large, better educated than enlisted service members. The basic dichotomy between officers and enlisted service members is that the enlisted personnel are the technical and tactical experts whose actions are planned, coordinated, and led by commissioned officers.

Officers are paid significantly better than enlisted personnel, in general receiving 2-3 times the pay of an enlisted service member with an equal number of years of service. For a Harvard graduate, the type of work that officers do is likely to be much more stimulating and rewarding. From day one in uniform, officers are charged with building teams, motivating people, and accomplishing missions that are often challenging, though sometimes mundane. Some recruiters may try to convince the would-be officer that he or she should "enlist first and become an officer later," saying

that the enlisted personnel they would be leading will respect them more if they have an enlisted background. While a personal decision, the experience of many Harvard officers has suggested that serving time as an enlisted service member is not a necessary prerequisite to excelling as an officer.

The vast majority of Harvard graduates who serve in the military do so as officers and the remainder of this publication will be dedicated to providing information to the prospective commissioned officer. We would urge those of you considering joining the military as an enlisted service member to discuss that decision at length with a Harvard graduate who has served in the military, as it is not a trivial decision. You should understand the lifestyle you will be embracing. We will now turn to the different commissioning pathways available to a Harvard student.

### ***Direct Commission***

The direct commission option is the least common process for becoming a military officer and it likely is not available to you. However, if you hold an advanced degree in medicine or law, it is possible that you can receive a direct commission into your preferred service to practice your profession. If you find yourself in this position and would like more information on direct commissioning, please contact a recruiter for the service branch of your choice.

### ***Service Academies***

The Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, and Navy all administer their own four-year universities. The admissions process is rigorous and includes physical, mental, and emotional evaluation of candidates. To receive an appointment to an academy (exception is the US Coast Guard Academy), a candidate must have a nomination from an approved source (most common is a member of Congress) and be competitively accepted by the Academy Admissions Committee. Students granted admission to one of the service academies receive a four-year undergraduate and leadership education of the highest caliber at no cost. Service academy students become commissioned officers upon graduation and are required to serve on active duty for five years or more, depending on their career field.

### ***Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)***

ROTC is a program of academic and leadership instruction combined with field training that allows the students who complete it to become commissioned officers upon their graduation from a civilian university. In addition to the training, students can apply to earn ROTC scholarships that cover the cost of tuition at a four-year university in return for an extended period of active military service, generally four years. The Army, Navy, and Air Force sponsor ROTC programs. Students who want to be Marine Corps officers participate in Naval ROTC. Of the five military services, only the Coast Guard does not have an ROTC program.

In 2011, Harvard formally recognized ROTC and eliminated many of the barriers that made ROTC participation difficult for Harvard students. However, Harvard does not have ROTC units physically located on campus. Students participating in Army, Navy, and Air Force ROTC do so through units physically located at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). These units at MIT serve a number of area schools. For information regarding the various ROTC units at MIT, refer to the following websites:

- Naval ROTC at MIT: [hnrotc.mit.edu](http://hnrotc.mit.edu)
- Air Force ROTC at MIT: [afrotc.mit.edu](http://afrotc.mit.edu)
- Army ROTC at MIT: [army.mit.edu](http://army.mit.edu)

### ***Officer Candidate School (OCS)***

Each of the five services maintains a program to train college graduates who want to become military officers. These programs allow those who do not participate in ROTC or attend a service academy to earn a commission. As such, these programs are often the ideal path to commissioning for individuals who decide during or after college that they wish to serve as military officers. The Officer Candidate Schools are a path to commissioning for enlisted service members who wish to become commissioned officers. This section briefly describes the five Officer Candidate School options.

**Air Force Officer Training School (OTS):** Located at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, AL, Air Force OTS is a 9-week program that is broken into four phases. The first part of the program is generally academic instruction regarding military skills and history. The second part is practical leadership development training in which officer trainees are given leadership positions over their peers and held responsible for planning, leading, and managing groups to accomplish various tasks. Graduates of Air Force OTS are commissioned as Second Lieutenants in the Air Force. For more information, visit: [www.airforce.com/education/military-training/ots](http://www.airforce.com/education/military-training/ots)

**Army OCS:** Army OCS is located at Fort Benning, GA. Prior to attending Army OCS, officer candidates are required to attend the 10-week Army Basic Combat Training (BCT, also known as boot camp) where they learn basic military skills including navigation, infantry tactics, drill and ceremony, and rifle marksmanship. After BCT, candidates attend a 12-week course at OCS that focuses on developing small unit leadership skills. Graduates of Army OCS are commissioned as Second Lieutenants in the US Army. For more information, see: [www.goarmy.com/ocs.html](http://www.goarmy.com/ocs.html)

**Coast Guard OCS:** Coast Guard OCS is a 17-week program conducted at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT. Graduates of Coast Guard OCS are commissioned as Ensigns in the US Coast Guard and may report to Coast Guard cutters (ships), staff jobs, or proceed to flight training. For more information, see: [www.gocoastguard.com/active-duty-careers/officer-opportunities/programs/officer-candidate-school-ocs](http://www.gocoastguard.com/active-duty-careers/officer-opportunities/programs/officer-candidate-school-ocs)

**Marine Corps OCS:** The Marine Corps' OCS is located at Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA. All Marine Corps Officers are initially trained at OCS, other than those who graduate from the US Naval Academy. Entrance into Marine Corps OCS is obtained through either the Platoon Leaders Class (PLC) program or the Officer Candidate Course program (OCC). The PLC program consists of two six-week sessions for first-years and sophomores or one ten-week session for juniors attended by a candidate during college summer(s). The OCC program is one ten-week session for seniors after college graduation and for graduates. Graduates of the Marine Corps OCS program are commissioned as Second Lieutenants in the US Marine Corps. For more information, see: [www.marines.com/becoming-a-marine/officer.html](http://www.marines.com/becoming-a-marine/officer.html)

**Naval OCS:** Located at Naval Station Newport, RI, Naval OCS is a 13-week course covering naval leadership, seamanship, navigation, naval administration, naval organization, sea power (military history), military indoctrination, naval warfare and damage control in addition to numerous physical challenges. Graduates of Naval OCS are commissioned as Ensigns in the US Navy. For more information, see: [www.navy.com/joining-the-navy/ways-to-join/become-a-commissioned-officer](http://www.navy.com/joining-the-navy/ways-to-join/become-a-commissioned-officer)

### ***Beyond Commissioning***

After commissioning, most officers regardless of service will receive additional training in an area or specialty field. This training can be extensive, particularly for aviators and special operations personnel. However, most officers find themselves at their first unit “on the job” within six months of commissioning. See the various services’ websites to find the type of specialty fields available for officers.

## **IV. Benefits of Military Service**

Joining the military has a host of benefits, the vast majority of which are personal. While military service will mean something different to each person, this section will discuss some of the most common benefits people cite when discussing why the military was such a great option for them. While we attempt to capture some of the primary benefits of military service, the best way to understand what service means is to talk to a current service member or veteran. The “Resources” section of this publication lets you know just how you can do this.

### ***Service and Impact***

At its core, serving in the military is the choice to serve a cause that is bigger than oneself. The people who enjoy the military most and who are the most effective leaders are those who truly believe in the mission and purpose of the armed forces. Whether you view your decision to be a military officer as serving the people of the United States of America, serving the men and women under your leadership, or serving the people of the nations where you are stationed or deployed, the impact that you will be able to have on the lives of others is likely more direct and more profound in the military than in any other line of work (especially for a new graduate).

In the military you will undoubtedly make a difference and as an officer you will contribute from day one to the development and well-being of your subordinates. You will plan and lead high-impact missions that directly impact the safety and security of the United States. You will make life and death decisions that have the ability to forever alter the world for individuals, communities, and nations. Having this level of impact in the service of a cause in which one believes is probably the single biggest benefit of serving as a military officer.

Additionally, the shared sacrifice and experience that military service entails forges extremely tight bonds between those who have served. The veteran communities at the Harvard graduate schools and at the College are among the most tightly knit of any affinity groups. You will be joining a global community based on the mantra: “Never leave a fallen comrade behind.” Drill Sergeants like to say at Basic Training that new recruits have just joined the biggest gang in the world. In many respects, they are right.

## ***Adventure***

The US military has a presence in over 150 countries across the globe. The training you will receive and the jobs you will do often take you to the most remote places in the world while pushing you beyond your perceived physical and mental limits. Whether you are becoming airborne qualified by jumping out of air planes, negotiating with a tribal leader in Afghanistan, navigating miles below the ocean's surface in a nuclear submarine, or providing global precision strike in an Air Force fighter jet, the military will put you in situations that define the word adventure.

Let's face it – some twenty-somethings just aren't ready to put on a suit and tie and go to work every day for the rest of their lives in a cubicle. The military provides people like those with the opportunity for a transformative experience that simply cannot be paralleled in terms of adventure and excitement in the civilian world. Just be careful – you might end up staying longer than you had planned.

## ***Leadership Training***

In your first assignment as a Second Lieutenant or an Ensign, you will be placed in charge of millions of dollars' worth of equipment and the lives of 10-40 American service members. You will work with your fellow officers and senior enlisted members to plan missions that are vital to America's interests throughout the world. While you will work with others to plan and lead your troops, responsibility for mission success or failure and for the lives of the young Americans under your command will be yours alone. This is a solemn responsibility, but also an amazing opportunity that does not have a civilian counterpart.

In survey after survey of corporate recruiters, governmental organizations, and top business schools, the traits that separate military veterans from those who followed a civilian career path are maturity, poise, and leadership skills. These are required and developed on a daily basis in the armed forces and if you are looking to develop them, there is no better way.

## ***Financial Benefits***

While the financial benefits of military service do not rival the investment banking and consulting salaries that many Harvard graduates will earn, the life of a military officer is not one of poverty. Military officers receive a base salary plus a tax-free allowance for housing and food. Additional monetary compensation comes in the form of tax-free combat pay and a variety of "special pays" for various skills that you may develop (for instance, language skills, flight skills, parachuting skills, and many others). In addition to this, military members receive free health care, vision care, dental care, access to tax-free retail outlets on military posts, the ability to participate the Thrift Savings Plan (federal government's version of a 401K), subsidized life insurance, and numerous commercial discounts and offers.

The benefits of military service extend beyond your time wearing the uniform. Veterans of the US Armed Forces are eligible for numerous benefits once they have left the service. While it is beyond the scope of this document to delve into all of these, it is worthwhile to highlight one.

## ***The Post 9/11-GI Bill***

The Post 9/11-GI Bill is a benefit that gives eligible veterans extensive financial assistance in paying

for advanced education. For more detailed information, visit [www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/](http://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/).

## **V. Costs of Military Service**

While serving in the military has lots of amazing benefits, it also requires real sacrifice. Many military officers have paid the ultimate cost by giving their lives in defense of the United States of America. Making sure that you understand the burdens as well as the benefits of service is critical to ensuring that your decision to serve is an informed one. Again, the best source of information about the service is someone who has served before and this section only attempts to highlight the most obvious sacrifices required of service members.

### ***The Risk of Injury or Death***

Make no mistake – a significant share of today’s military force is asked to go in harm’s way. Many officers have died in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and countless more have been severely injured. A Harvard education will not protect you from the dangers of these conflicts and if you join the military you should understand that you will very likely end up in dangerous situations. If anyone tells you differently, they are not being honest with you.

Moreover, even if you are not physically injured, the psychological toll that combat takes on the mind can be incredibly taxing. You will see sights, hear sounds, and smell odors that will stay with you for the rest of your life. You will be asked as a routine matter to do and experience things that the majority of people and the vast majority of Harvard graduates will never have to do and will never understand. It is important that you have an appreciation for this before you don the uniform.

The military will prepare you well for the challenges you will face. You will have unparalleled training, mentorship, and resources to accomplish the missions that you are asked to undertake. However, no amount of training or experience can pierce the fog of war and make the chaos of the battlefield controllable, predictable, or safe. The job of the military officer is to lead and manage despite that chaos and it is a life-changing experience.

### ***Morality of Military Service***

No one finds joy in taking human life, but that is part of the job that the US military does in the name of the people of the United States of America. Sometimes you or your unit are directly responsible for determining who lives and who dies. Other times, you simply perform a job as part of the system that results in people’s deaths. While your proximity to the act may vary widely, everyone in the military contributes to the accomplishment of its mission, which inevitably involves the killing of human beings. Due to the fog of war and chaos of the battlefield, even innocent civilians sometimes die. As an organization, the US military goes to great lengths to minimize the effects of its actions on innocent people. But it is impossible to guarantee that non-combatants will not be affected by our operations.

Wielding lethal force on behalf of the nation is a solemn job and one that is done on a daily basis by the US military. It is important to understand this before you join.

### ***Consistent Deployments and Transient Lifestyle***

In order to sustain operations throughout the globe, America's soldiers, airmen, sailors, marines, and coast guardsmen have been spent a great deal of time overseas. It is not uncommon for a service member to be deployed on average one out of every three years to a combat zone. At the peak of the fighting in Iraq, many soldiers and marines found themselves deployed even more than that. While some believe America's military commitments are winding down, the reality is that American service members will continue to be deployed to the Middle East for the foreseeable future and that the geopolitical context is such that America's involvement in future conflicts is not unlikely.

Beyond deployments, service members are generally stationed at a particular base for three year increments. The quality of the locations of military installations are highly variable (as an Army infantry officer, you could end up stationed in Hawaii or in Lawton, OK – determined by the luck of the draw). Many people find this lack of continuity in living situations to be one of the most challenging aspects of the military lifestyle.

For many of you, these concerns will not be very troubling. In fact, they may even be attractive as deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan is probably a major reason that you are interested in joining the service. However, they are the reality of military life and something to be aware of, particularly if you plan on starting a family during your service.

### ***The Military is a Bureaucratic Hierarchy***

While much of your time in the military will be spent leading and conducting high-impact missions and training, the military is a hulking bureaucracy and some of your time will also be spent complying with administrative requirements, standing in lines or supervising your troops as they stand in lines, and executing other mundane tasks. The military is infamous for its "hurry up and wait" culture and at times you can feel like a very small cog in a very large machine. The bureaucracy extends beyond impacting your daily activities and also affects how you are evaluated and what opportunities are available to you. Especially at the lower ranks of the officer corps, the military is not a meritocracy. For the most part, you will receive very similar assignments to your peers and you will be promoted in lockstep with them, regardless of your relative performance. Sometimes the bureaucracy will work to your advantage and you will receive a great opportunity by being at the right place at the right time. At other times, it will seem to foil even the simplest of plans.

The military functions through the chain of command. As a new officer, you will be at the top of the very bottom of this chain. You will be "in charge" of a small unit, but that unit will be a small part of many larger units. You will have a superior officer to whom you are responsible and whose orders you are obligated to carry out. Some of these superior officers will be the best mentors you have ever had, will teach you invaluable lessons, and will never be forgotten. Others you will think are not fit for their position, and perhaps are not doing the right thing for the military. Depending upon the culture of your unit, sometimes you will be able to air these viewpoints behind closed doors. Sometimes you will not. But regardless of your feelings toward your superior, unless the order he

or she gives you is illegal, you will be required to carry it out and support it. The chain of command is a cornerstone of a functioning military and you must respect it.

Sometimes these two characteristics of the military—its bureaucratic nature and the sanctity of the chain of command—are the most frustrating for Harvard graduates. Administratively, Harvard is run like a well-oiled machine and many are shocked by the relative inefficiency of the military. Harvard is also a place that fosters free exchange of ideas and thrives on a culture of “agreeing to disagree.” Simply recognizing that the military is different and that there are good reasons for it to be different is the first step to functioning effectively in the military. Oftentimes, you can infuse a little of the Harvard culture into the military and it will make it a stronger organization. But you can only do this if people recognize that you respect the military and its institutions as well.

## **VI. What Does Joining the Military Mean for Your Future?**

Many past Harvard veterans were eager to answer the call to serve their country for 3-5 years after college, but they worried about what joining the military would mean for their civilian careers afterward. Most prospective Harvard officers, indeed most officers in general, do not plan on making a career out of military service. Most want to serve and give back to their country for a few years while they are young and then re-enter civilian life, hopefully at no disadvantage for having chosen the path of service. It is important to understand what military service will mean for your post-military career in the civilian sector.

First, the leadership, management, teamwork, and technical skills that you develop as a military officer are highly valued by civilian employers. These skills become more valuable the further along one goes in his or her career and often they are skills that your civilian counterparts simply do not have. These skills, particularly the leadership and management skills, are ones that are true differentiators whether you are seeking a career in business, medicine, law, non-profit management, or many other fields. In fact, 4% of Harvard Business School’s Class of 2024 served in the military. Many top investment banks, consulting firms, and corporations in America have active recruiting programs to hire veterans. Many law schools and medical schools also recognize the value of admitting students who bring the veteran’s perspective into the classroom.

Secondly, the military may open doors for your future that other organizations cannot. Service as a military officer requires you to obtain a security clearance, which is a pre-requisite for many jobs in the government and national security fields. Counterterrorism, security studies, and public policy are academic areas where one’s credentials and opportunities are substantially buttressed by having served in the military. And today, having served in the military can be a gateway to public service in elected or appointed positions at the state and federal level. In short, the military can open doors to opportunities that you may not have known existed.

Additionally, there is always the possibility that you will love the role you play in the nation’s defense and that you will choose to continue your service either on active-duty or in the National Guard or Reserves. Today, many Harvard graduates who intended on serving a short stint after college continue to move up the ranks in the US military. Some simply find that there is no career as

rewarding and impactful as that of a military officer and they choose to continue on in service. While you wouldn't be the first Harvard graduate to become a General, you could be the next.

Finally, as was mentioned earlier, you will make friends and meet mentors who will remain with you for the rest of your life. You will have the courage and quiet self-assurance that only comes from knowing that you truly challenged yourself and lived up to the challenge. You will take pride in the fact that you were one of the few that stood up and answered the call to defend your homeland when it was in need. You will leave the service with relationships, confidence, and a pride that will change the course of your life regardless of what you choose to do in the civilian world.

## VII. Resources

This section provides a list of books and websites that many veterans and service members have found valuable in their decision-making process. While this list is not exhaustive, it is a great starting point!

### *Books*

- ***To Benning and Back*, by Monroe Mann.** A day-by-day, blow-by-blow account of life at Fort Benning for US Army Basic Training and Officer Candidate School, composed from the diary of a New Yorker who went through it. While some of the specific facts of training are a bit dated, it gives a great preview of what training will be like.
- ***One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*, by Nathaniel Fick.** This is the memoir of a Dartmouth graduate who joins the Marines as a Force Reconnaissance platoon commander. It gives a great insight into what military training is like and the experience of an Ivy League graduate in the Marine Corps.
- ***The Warrior Elite*, by Dick Couch.** Dick Couch was granted unparalleled access to Navy SEAL training and takes the reader through the challenges of that training and into the minds of these warriors who comprise our nation's highly selective fighting force. For anyone interested in becoming a SEAL, this is a must read.

### *Websites*

- [www.military.com/](http://www.military.com/) This website is a must-visit for answers to any questions you have regarding military life, benefits, and any type of information you are looking for regarding the services.
- These are the official recruiting websites for the five US military services. These sites will give you a good idea of the types of jobs available, answer common questions that new recruits often have, and point you in the direction of resources and recruiters who can help you go through the process of joining the military:
  - [www.airforce.com/](http://www.airforce.com/)
  - [www.goarmy.com/](http://www.goarmy.com/)
  - [www.gocoastguard.com/](http://www.gocoastguard.com/)
  - [www.navy.com/](http://www.navy.com/)

- [www.marines.com/](http://www.marines.com/)
- For most of those reading this booklet, the most common path to commissioning will be through one of the services' Officer Candidate Schools. These websites provide extensive information on what to expect, how to prepare, and what life is like at the various courses.
  - Air Force: [www.airforce.com/education/military-training/ots](http://www.airforce.com/education/military-training/ots)
  - Coast Guard: [www.gocoastguard.com/active-duty-careers/officer-opportunities/programs/officer-candidate-school-ocs](http://www.gocoastguard.com/active-duty-careers/officer-opportunities/programs/officer-candidate-school-ocs)
  - Marines: [www.marines.com/becoming-a-marine/officer.html](http://www.marines.com/becoming-a-marine/officer.html)
  - Army: [www.goarmy.com/ocs.html](http://www.goarmy.com/ocs.html)
  - Navy: [www.navy.com/joining-the-navy/ways-to-join/become-a-commissioned-officer](http://www.navy.com/joining-the-navy/ways-to-join/become-a-commissioned-officer)
- These are the websites for the MIT Navy, Air Force, and Army ROTC units. If you are interested in ROTC or learning more about the military, they are a great place to start:
  - [nrotc.mit.edu](http://nrotc.mit.edu)
  - [afrotc.mit.edu](http://afrotc.mit.edu)
  - [www.army-rotc.mit.edu](http://www.army-rotc.mit.edu)

In addition to these websites, a simple Google search will yield countless web pages and blogs that will give you an insight into what military life is like. Additionally, you can find endless resources on the web or in a bookstore concerning physical and mental preparation for military training and the military lifestyle. You can also access the [Harvard Alumni Directory](#) or [LinkedIn](#) to connect with Harvard alumni who have served in the armed forces.

## **VIII. Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization**

The Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization (HVAO) is a Shared-Interest Group of the Harvard Alumni Association. The mission of the HVAO is to “CONNECT a community of Harvard Veterans, both on and off campus; BRIDGE between Harvard University and its Military Affiliated Communities; and HONOR the history, service and sacrifice of Harvard Veterans.”

If you are interested in talking to a Harvard veteran about military service, please visit [www.harvardveterans.org/](http://www.harvardveterans.org/) or reach out to HVAO at [communications@harvardveterans.org](mailto:communications@harvardveterans.org).

## **Harvard Undergraduate Veterans Organization**

“The Harvard Undergraduate Veterans Organization is focused on guiding veterans through the application process, encouraging academic and professional development, and fostering a welcoming community.”

To learn more and connect with HUVO, please visit: [www.huvets.com/](http://www.huvets.com/)

## Harvard College Dean of Students Office

Craig Rogers, Psy.D., J.D., Program Manager for Military Student Services

"As Program Manager for Military Student Services, I have the honor of working with Harvard College students who are current or prospective ROTC participants (cadets and midshipmen), veterans, or have other military affiliations. If you are in any of those categories or if you are otherwise involved with any of those students, please feel free to contact me with whatever's on your mind. I'm here to help!"

[dso.college.harvard.edu/people/craig-rodgers](https://dso.college.harvard.edu/people/craig-rodgers)

[crodgers@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:crodgers@fas.harvard.edu)



"The skills and character one develops through military service—leadership, decision-making, perseverance, initiative, teamwork—map seamlessly from the battlefield to the corporate world. These intangible traits are some of the most important attributes of any candidate we recruit and they are critical to our success regardless of line of business, location or function. Military service refines and hones these qualities and makes those who have worn the uniform extremely competitive candidates should they choose to pursue a career in corporate America."

Jamie Dimon, Chairman & CEO of JPMorgan Chase



Commander Geoffrey S. Gage (right)  
Harvard College 1987  
Formerly: US Naval Aviator, 21 years of service

"Living in Lionel Hall and Kirkland House, scribbling in blue books during finals in Memorial Hall and eating under the butter-pad encrusted antlers of Teddy Roosevelt's hunting exploits made me realize I was part of something much older and more important than myself. Harvard is, at some level, America at its best. And America at its best, notwithstanding TR's elk slaughtering, is about service. It could be service in the military or as a government civilian. It could be as an elected representative. It could be service in the local community or at the state level. But service is what fulfills us as individuals and makes us great as a nation.

If, while at Harvard, you succeed on the fields (or rivers, in my case) of friendly athletic strife and in the classroom, you are prepared for any career, including the military. Success in combat is about teamwork supported by intense personal preparation. Success in combat is about great personal confidence and trust in your teammates. Success in combat is about sacrifice and selfless service. Harvard prepared me well."



First Lieutenant J. Danielle Williams  
Harvard College 2008  
Formerly: US Army Civil Affairs Officer, 3 years of service

“Definitely do your research before you join, and try to be flexible. Talk to service members and veterans and try to figure out what works best for you. There are lots of options: National Guard, Reserves, Active-duty—let those who have been there before help you make those decisions. The military may not be exactly what you expect, but the overall experience and lessons learned in leadership, decision making, and taking care of other people cannot be replicated or reproduced in any other career field.”



Captain Barret F. Bradstreet  
Harvard College 2001  
US Marine Corps Infantry Company Commander, 9 years of service

“If military service appeals to you, gather as much information as you can from peers, friends, and relations, and only then reach out to the recruiting office. You might also read a bit on the life of a junior officer.”

If you do decide to join active service, I expect that you may be surprised by the frequency with which you encounter Harvard friends and classmates in uniform around the world. Military service is not the most common career choice of your classmates, but you will find a respectable cadre of them out across the world in the different branches of service.”



“At Harvard Business School, veterans of military service bring a remarkable perspective and set of leadership experiences to the classroom. In an environment that relies on peer-to-peer learning, this is incredibly important, and it means that our military students are a deeply respected group – in fact, they are the students their classmates want to hear from more often.”

Nitin Nohria, Former Dean of Harvard Business School



Lieutenant Stephanie Hendricks  
Harvard College 2005  
Formerly: US Navy Intelligence Officer

"It is not the easiest decision, but serving in the military is a unique experience. Your peers will be fascinated by your stories and your experiences will be more memorable and exciting than any other traditional first job after college. It can be a tough schedule and lifestyle, but everything you experience and are exposed to makes it worth it. The camaraderie is unmatched in any "office" role and the responsibilities surpass your peers in their civilian jobs. The skill set you leave the military with will serve you for

whatever follows. You are a leader. You are trained to be a leader and as you serve you learn lessons that mold you into a better one. And that is relevant for the rest of your life."



Captain Robert Wheeler  
Harvard College 2005, Harvard Business School 2011  
Formerly: US Army Air and Missile Defense Officer

"I joined the military knowing I wanted to serve my country for four years and then return to the private sector for my career. In the military, I received an awesome amount of responsibility planning and managing America's air and missile defense system for current and future conflicts. I know that I made a difference, contributed to American security, and made a difference in lives of the men and women I led. And now that I'm back in the civilian

sector, I realize that the military prepared me incredibly well for a career in business and management. In fact, sometimes my tasks seem downright easy compared to what my fellow soldiers and I were asked to do in the Army."