



A VA program covers Reynolds' tuition and books at Rochester

FROM THE BATTLEFIELD TO B-SCHOOL

By Jane Porter

Donovan Campbell was sobbing, his head sunk in his hands. He hadn't been planning to break down in front of his Harvard MBA class. His professor had just shown the World War II movie *Twelve O'Clock High* as part of a lesson on leadership, unleashing a torrent of emotion in the six-foot-three, square-jawed Marine Corps officer. With the movie on pause in the background, he found himself talking about the hardships of leading men in one of the



Reynolds was severely wounded by shrapnel while serving in Iraq

bloodiest battles in Ramadia, Iraq—the angst, the tough decisions, the insomnia, the lonely burden of combat leadership. “Since the day I lost my first and only man in May of 2004, I hadn’t cried once,” Campbell writes in an e-mail from Kabul, where he’s serving another tour of duty. “For some reason, right there in class it all hit me.”

Campbell’s decision to make the sometimes difficult transition to civilian life through business school is increasingly common for military men and women. Of the tens of thousands of officers leaving the armed forces each year, a growing number are finding their way to MBA programs, where schools and companies are eager to recruit these battle-tested leaders. Last year, 15,259, or 6%, of the people who took the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) required by most B-schools identified themselves as having military backgrounds, and applications by veterans are climbing at many schools. At the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business, the number of military applicants rose 62% this year over last. Of the 40 military students enrolled, 38 served in Afghanistan or Iraq.

The increase is coming about in part because the pipeline from battlefield to B-school has be-

come far more organized. The Graduate Management Admissions Council, which publishes the GMAT, has set up a test center on a base in the U.S. and soon will open one in Japan. B-schools, including those at Cornell, Harvard, and Rochester, are using people with military experience to recruit. Some schools are adding more scholarships, and Wall Street firms such as Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan are holding networking events geared to veterans.

For many employers, the appeal of MBAs with military experience is simple: mature, highly disciplined employees with practical and tactical skills well above those of their civilian peers. Many in the military, meanwhile, see B-school as a bridge into civilian life. For Campbell it also meant a chance to spend more time with his family. The clincher in his decision to go to B-school was a conversation he had with Steve Reinemund, then-chairman and CEO of PepsiCo and a family friend. Reinemund, a former Marine captain, told Campbell that his years at Darden gave him

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valuable time for his family. He urged him to think of B-school as a chance to spend more time with his wife, who was pregnant at the time, than he'd be able to if he went directly into a high-pressure job in the corporate world. Campbell, who spent his first two wedding anniversaries in Iraq, was convinced.

The challenges these officers overcome to get into B-school start with finding time to fill out applications and take the GMAT, many while on active duty. The Graduate Manage-

ment Admissions Council's "Operation MBA," which identifies military-friendly B-schools that waive application fees, offer financial aid, or give one-year deferrals for military students in need, is trying to make that easier. A GMAT test center was opened in Fort Hood (Tex.) in January, and another is planned to open this year at Yokota Air Base in Japan. David Ball, an Army lieutenant who enrolled at Texas A&M's Mays Business School in 2007, filled out his last-minute applications while at Fort Hood and getting up at 6:00 a.m. every day to ready a battalion for deployment.

Many potential military MBAs must complete applications while deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan. Brian Tice, for example, put the finishing touches on his applications between enemy raids and sniper operations near an air base in Iraq. After six deployments around the world by age 30, the Marine infantry officer was ready to settle down. So on his sixth and final deployment, Tice wrote his Stanford application essay from a burnt-out abandoned building near the air base. He was interviewed over the phone by an admissions officer while standing in the middle of the desert, helicopters thundering overhead. "The Marines come first, and the mission comes first, but this is going to be the stepping-stone for the rest of your life," says Tice. "In between missions and

planning stages I'd be communicating by e-mail or asking people for letters of recommendation from Iraq." In May, Tice will graduate from the Sloan Program at Stanford Graduate School of Business, a condensed yearlong Masters program for students with more management experience than the typical MBA.

Once officers decide to apply to B-school, a new set of challenges emerge. Many encounter a culture almost as foreign as the one they struggled to make sense of overseas. The culture clash can begin as early as the admissions interview. Wesley Lippman, a Marine lieutenant nearly killed by a roadside bomb, found that the relentless self-promotion required during admissions interviews did not come easily to someone steeped in the Marines' culture of selflessness and teamwork. For Joseph Ewers, an infantry major who graduated from Harvard last year and returned to the military to teach, getting used to the daily grind of B-school was a shock. "One day I am responsible for 400 soldiers and \$80 million of equipment...and the next day it's me and my homework. In a sense, it's so much smaller... but it's a different kind of difficulty." While Ewers knew what was required to succeed in the service, he "hadn't studied a lick of business" before arriving as a first-year MBA, and worried that he'd be out of his league.

Other vets struggle to adjust to more profound cultural differences. In the military, leadership, camaraderie, and patriotism moti-

\$109,720

Average salary
for veterans with
MBAs in 2007

Data: Military MBA



Ball squeezed in time for his application to Texas A&M while at Fort Hood



vated everything Matthew Bacik, who lost his right foot in Baghdad, did. At Auburn University, where he got his MBA last spring, he says there was no such thing. “In the military there is a common set of beliefs everyone shares at the same level,” says Bacik. At Auburn, “it was challenging to figure out what people valued and what ideas motivated different people. It’s no longer posted on the wall of every office you walk into.”

That sentiment is one Harvard Business School professor Scott Snook has heard many times before. Snook’s 22-year military career has made him a mentor to the program’s 81 vets, a handful of whom meet in his office on Fridays to sip scotch and share stories. Often, vets are plagued with uncertainty, confusion, and a sense of abandoning their duties—especially if they hear their platoon has been deployed again. “There’s some survivor’s guilt,” says Snook. “One challenge you don’t have in the military is finding meaning in what you’re doing, and here they are learning about selling soap and moving numbers around on a ledger. Some of them have difficulty looking for the purpose behind that.”

The adjustments can be physical as well. For soldiers such as Bacik and Lippman who were severely injured in combat, continuing on active duty is no longer an option. Some vets, such as 27-year-old William Reynolds, are getting help from the government. Reynolds was severely injured by shrapnel from a bomb while on a mission in Iraq. His injuries led to 22 operations, loss of feeling in his left hand, and a stiff left knee. As part of a Veterans Affairs rehabilitation program that covers the cost of his tuition and books, he started an MBA at the University of Rochester in New York last year.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

When vets enter B-school, they have a very different background from their civilian peers. At Darden, for example, the typical MBA student has four years of work experience, a \$76,500 salary, and a one-in-four chance of being married. Veterans, by contrast, have six years of experience, earn \$54,000, and are nearly twice as likely to be married. By 26, these military MBAs have also managed risks that CEOs of most Fortune 100 companies would never dream of tackling. Ryan McDermott, a second-year student at Darden, led a combat mission down the most dangerous road in Baghdad, fought four battles, and



wrote a plan for training and deploying 3,600 soldiers, all by the age of 26. Summer Jones, a former Naval officer, by 26 had launched Tomahawk missiles off a ship in the Persian Gulf, commanded 200 sailors, and delivered the news of Sept. 11 Pentagon casualties to their families. When her Georgetown University evening MBA classmates wonder how the 32-year-old maintains a full-time job, raises two children, supports her husband in law school, and earns her MBA at the same time, she tells them: “When you’ve been in a war-time environment, you step back and say, ‘This is easy.’” As if to prove it, she gave birth to her second son just after the first week of the MBA program without missing a day of class.

For Jones, who served nearly 10 years in the military, long enough to avoid a recall, the transition to civilian life was complete. But many officers, even after they have decided to end their military careers and enroll in B-school, can be called back to active duty for up to four years—disrupting their studies or new careers. Last spring, when the Marine Corps

After Jones’ military service, the demands of school and family seem easy

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Hear from a military MBA headhunter about why these grads are hot commodities, and from a Harvard B-school prof and vet on what they bring to the classroom. Plus, a slide show featuring MBA vets and their stories.

issued its first involuntary recall in 35 years, Campbell was on the short list. He was halfway into his last semester at Harvard Business School with a 2-year-old daughter at home and a signing bonus at PepsiCo in hand when orders to report for duty came in the mail. With two deployments in Iraq already behind him at 29, Campbell had been sure that his military career was over. He was able to graduate last spring, and is now stationed on a base in Kabul. His Harvard degree is framed in his home, PepsiCo pays him a salary, and a job at the Dallas office awaits his return.

Veterans are seen as particularly appealing candidates by companies looking to fill management pipelines quickly with highly skilled employees. And many companies are willing to pay a significant premium to get them. According to Military MBA, an education and employment network for military officers, veterans with MBAs earned \$109,720 in 2007, or about 18% more than the average. Alan Chase, who runs an executive search firm that

connects companies with military vets who have MBAs, says the strategic skills that these officers hone at such a young age are a huge draw. "It's rare for someone in their twenties to have that depth of maturity," says Chase. At NYU's Stern Military Veterans Club last fall, JPMorgan, Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs, and Credit Suisse held networking events geared specifically to officers like Campbell.

After graduation, Bacik will be taking a position at an investment bank based in Alabama, and McDermott will join Lehman Brothers. Tice is going to an Arlington, Va., real estate developer, and Reynolds plans to look for work in health care. Jones, who works for the Louis Berger Group, a New Jersey-based engineering consulting company, says what awaits them in the world of business is just as challenging as anything they faced on the battlefield. "You are in the fog of war all of the time in business," says Jones. "It's just fortunate that now all we stand to lose is money and not anybody's life." **| BW |**



While serving as an officer in the Navy, Jones was responsible for 200 sailors

(LEFT) DAVID DEAL

EVEN THE BRASS IS HITTING THE BOOKS

Why the military sends its high-ranking officers to B-school

By Jane Porter

The war in Iraq—an \$11 billion-a-month endeavor involving 170,000 soldiers and 163,000 contract workers—is one unwieldy enterprise. The brass faces relentless pressures overseeing troops, managing outside employees, creating new war tactics, and dealing with tight budgets. So officials in Washington are sending top-rank officers to business schools to learn to think more like their corporate peers. These days, "you have to have a bigger kit bag of management tools," says Michael Shaler, who leads the Army's Strategic Leadership Development Program.

Last month the Army dispatched 22 one- and two-star generals and high-ranking civilian executives to the

University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School for a week. The Army's 307 active-duty generals will complete a program that includes lessons on negotiation, organizational change, and cost structure—concepts that Shaler says are "fairly revolutionary" in the Army.

The UNC program is modeled on one started by the Navy in 2003 that has trained nearly 500 officers. The Air Force began a similar program last year. "Now you have more things you have to do with a given level of resources," says Harry Quast, a Navy coordinator for higher education. "Instead of building aircraft carriers, which we still do, we need things that are more appropriate to the type of challenges in Afghanistan

and Iraq.... It heightens the requirement to make operations more efficient."

Since its start, the Navy program has added courses on risk management and strategic planning, including some at Babson College's F.W. Olin Graduate School of Business. "When you get to

be an admiral, those positions are more like business jobs," says James W. Dean, UNC's dean of academic affairs.

Steven Anderson, chief of logistics operations and readiness for the Army staff, was in the UNC classroom for the Army pilot program last month. Just back from 15 months in Baghdad, Anderson says the \$5 billion-a-year contractor operation he oversaw requires skills in negotiation and collaboration, strategic planning, and Six Sigma principles that were covered in the UNC program. "Growing up, we used to say the Army is all about leadership, not management [efficiency]," Anderson says. "We'd talk effectiveness. The culture now is a cost-conscious one that embraces efficiency and effectiveness."