

Chris Mandernach '08 drove a ship into a mine-filled river, at night, during a sandstorm, on purpose. Jon "Tyler" McGaughey '09 led the battalion that seized one of Saddam Hussein's Presidential Palaces. Ken Harbaugh '08 flew combat reconnaissance, commanding the only EP-3 aircraft in the Pacific immediately following 9/11.

Mandernach, McGaughey, and Harbaugh are among a small but growing contingent of Law School students who are veterans. This past year the Law School was home to nine students who have served on active military duty.

# From War to Law School

by Kaitlin Thomas

*Jon "Tyler" McGaughey (right) takes a break with his commanding officer during some down time in Fallujah in April 2004.*





**CHRIS MANDERNACH '08 LIEUTENANT, U.S. NAVY**

In 2003, as coalition forces were poised to invade Iraq, Chris Mandernach '08 was stationed aboard the USS *Raven* in the Khawr Abd Allah, a shallow river that joins southern Iraq and northern Kuwait. During that first night of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Lieutenant Mandernach and his fellow sailors looked to the sky lit by Tomahawk missiles and waited for the signal to drive their ship into a minefield.

The *Raven's* mission: to find and disarm sea mines. At a mere 188 feet long and 38 feet wide, the *Raven's* high-definition sonar and remotely operated submarine put it on the front line, clearing a path for larger boats to make their way to Iraq's sole deep water port of Umm Qasr.

"We knew, based on what the Iraqi government had done in the first Gulf War, it was likely that the whole stretch of river was going to be mined," Mandernach explains. The *Raven's* crew studied sonar returns, identified potential mines, and then dismantled them. Even now, Mandernach speaks of the power of mines with reverence. "Mines lurk unseen, constantly listening for ships' sounds or sensing for pressure changes in the water column. They are unforgiving," he says.

Mandernach's route to the Middle East began in a small town in northern Minnesota with a childhood dream of becoming an astronaut. As a high school student, he set his mind on the Naval Academy, hoping an education there would lead to NASA. By the time he realized his poor eyesight would keep him from a career as an astronaut, he had become enamored with the idea of the Naval Academy as a way for a small-town kid to break out and see the world.

"It took a while for my parents to warm to the idea," he says. "They were always very supportive, but the Navy wouldn't have been their first choice."

After graduating with distinction from the Naval Academy, Mandernach matriculated at George Washington University, earning a master's degree in security policy studies while moonlighting within Navy Staff's political military affairs division. From there he joined the crew of the USS *Chancellorsville*, and was stationed in Yokosuka, Japan, for two years before being stationed in Bahrain aboard the *Raven*.

During his time in the Navy, Mandernach drove naval warships into nineteen different ports in twelve different countries on four different continents. He flew airplanes over the Gulf of Mexico and sailplanes over the Rocky Mountains. He drove a submarine 700 feet beneath the Atlantic. He had rocks thrown at him by young Bahraini children waiting for their school bus. He listened to a panicked voice crackle

over a loudspeaker, announcing fears of a chemical attack headed his way. He saw firsthand the way war changes day-to-day: Iraqi fisherman first welcoming him as a liberator, then, within weeks, shunning him as an occupier.

When he thinks of his eight years of service, it's the sounds and smells and memories of the people he worked with that come back first.

"There are these days in Bahrain," he remembers, "when it's 130 degrees, the sun is setting, you've got sand and dust and evening call to prayer barking over the speakers through the town. And here I am, this American, this kid from Minnesota. There are so many memories like that."

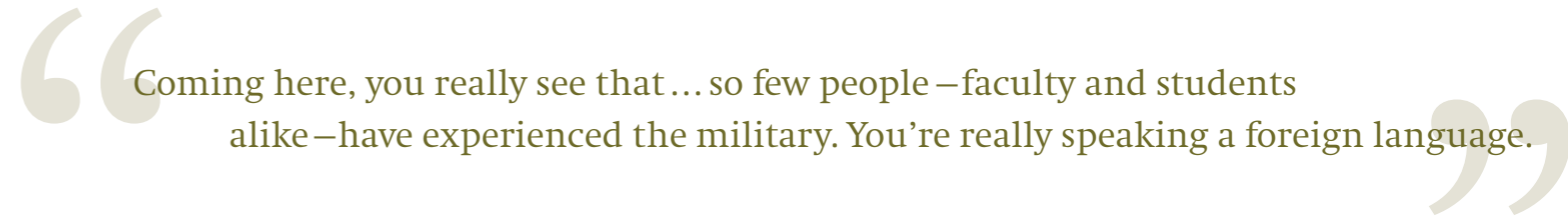
After serving overseas, Mandernach returned to the Naval Academy where he taught in the political science department, instructing midshipmen majoring in information technology with a concentration in national security.

Now finishing his second year at the Law School, Mandernach's transition to YLS was smooth, despite what he refers to as a "language barrier" between those who have served and those who haven't. "It sounds cliché now," Mandernach says, "but it's true that there's a culture gap between the military and the American public. Coming here, you really see that... so few people—faculty and students alike—have experienced the military. You're really speaking a foreign language."

After spending years being a practitioner of policy created by others, Mandernach now has his sights set on serving the country by being involved in making policy. To that end, he



A view from the bridgeway of the USS *Chancellorsville* while at anchor in Hong Kong harbor in May 2000.



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will serve with the legal adviser at the State Department this summer.

"I left the Navy with a good taste in my mouth," he says. "But some of my experiences also showed me that foreign policymakers often miss the human consequences of their actions, and sometimes even end up undermining their own policy intentions. I understand the consequences of policy decisions because I have lived them. Now, I'd like to help shape those policy decisions."



**JON "TYLER" MCGAUGHEY '09 CAPTAIN, U.S. MARINES**

Jon "Tyler" McGaughey '09 always knew he would become a Marine. His grandfather fought as a Marine in World War II and the Korean War. His father served first as an enlisted Marine in Vietnam, and later as a Marine officer flying helicopters for twenty years.

"Growing up and hanging around my father's friends and hearing their stories, I always knew I wanted to serve my country as a Marine for at least a few years," McGaughey says.

As a student at the University of Virginia, McGaughey participated in NROTC (Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps) and was commissioned a second lieutenant upon his graduation in 2001.

Fast forward from that kid listening to his father's war stories and training with NROTC to March 2003 when McGaughey, an officer in Company B, First Battalion, Fifth Marines and on his first deployment to Iraq, was among the first American troops to cross the Iraqi border. After being staged in Kuwait for all of February and the beginning of



Tyler McGaughey (center) with two of the local Iraqi police he worked with while conducting counter-insurgency operations on the outskirts of Fallujah in May 2004 after the First Battle of Fallujah.

March 2003, McGaughey's battalion was ordered over the border when the Iraqi oilfields began to burn.

After securing the Rumaylah oilfields, the battalion moved north to what is now Sadr City to penetrate the heart of Baghdad from the north and seize one of Saddam Hussein's presidential palaces.

USS *Chancellorsville* photograph by Chris Mandernach; Fallujah photograph courtesy of Tyler McGaughey

Last year, Chris Mandernach '08 and Ken Harbaugh '08 founded the Yale Law Veterans Association, a non-partisan group seeking to promote discussion about military and national security-related issues that impact the Yale community. In May, the Association hosted a panel discussion about ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Three active-duty Army officers joined in an informal, candid discussion about their recent experiences in the two countries.



“In the Marines they don’t use the Socratic Method to tease out the principles of assembling and disassembling the M16A2 service rifle.

“At the beginning of that attack, my company was at the rear of the battalion,” McGaughey remembers, explaining that the units rotate position, and that his battalion had been in the lead in an earlier attack. “As we assaulted into the city,” he continues, “the lead company had some of their vehicles break down, and the battalion stalled in the middle of a major highway. Not good.”

McGaughey, commanding his company’s lead vehicle, was moved to the front of the battalion. He quickly realized that somehow the battalion had gotten off course, and it was his job to get the Marines—approximately 600 of them—back on track.

“It was the middle of the night and my map was in black and white,” he says. “I had GPS, but after months in the desert it was prone to turn off for no reason ... I was having a hard time figuring out where we were and where we needed to go.”

McGaughey knew the palace was on the edge of the Tigris River and had a general idea of where the river was, so he pointed his vehicle in that direction and led the battalion through the city.

“As we made our way through the city we started taking enemy fire,” he remembers, “... multiple RPGs hit our vehicle and some of my Marines were badly wounded. We eventually made it to the palace—which was empty, despite intelligence reports to the contrary—and my Marines were evacuated. All of them lived.”

What McGaughey does not say about that experience is that his role in gaining U.S. control of the Al Azimuyah Presidential Palace (as well as his work securing a bridge over the Saddam Canal and capturing an enemy mortar section in a small village outside of Baghdad) earned him a Bronze Star with valor.

On his second deployment to Iraq, just six months after the first, McGaughey found himself in the besieged Al Anbar Province. His battalion participated in the first Battle of Fallujah in April 2004, and conducted counter-insurgency operations in the villages surrounding Fallujah for the next few months. He earned the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with valor for firefights that took place during that time.

Though McGaughey saw some of Iraq’s worst ground combat, he also spent much of his five years of active duty in routine training while based at Camp Pendleton, California. After his second deployment to Iraq, he returned to the U.S.

and was in charge of supervising the training of a reserve infantry unit stationed in Las Vegas, Nevada.

His ultimate plan, though, had always been to become a lawyer. Yale’s small classes and open curriculum appealed to him. “I also liked Dean Koh’s speech during admitted students’ weekend,” he says. “Especially the part where he said that Yale is the place where you can start doing things that please you instead of things that please ‘them.’”

What pleases McGaughey most now is studying criminal law with an eye toward becoming a federal prosecutor or criminal defense attorney.

“Some things about being a civilian are nice,” he says. “I can decide not to shave on a given day without being yelled at and I can grow out my hair if I feel like it.

“On the other hand, it has been a little tough transitioning to a different teaching style—law school teaching and Marine teaching are markedly different,” he adds. “In the Marines they don’t use the Socratic Method to tease out the principles of assembling and disassembling the M16A2 service rifle. Also, surprisingly, debating current policies/regulations and offering suggestions for improvement is not something that is highly encouraged. But the adjustment [to law school] hasn’t been too difficult, and I am enjoying the challenge.”

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#### **KENNETH HARBAUGH '08 LIEUTENANT, U.S. NAVY**

As a Navy pilot assigned to combat reconnaissance, Ken Harbaugh’s call sign was “Poet.” Harbaugh earned the nickname for his introspective nature and his penchant to wax, well, poetic. The name stuck after he won two major writing awards. Today, it’s a call sign he’s still living up to, contributing commentary pieces to National Public Radio that have landed him in some hot water.

Though Harbaugh comes from a line of veterans—his grandfather flew bombers in World War II, taking an explosive anti-aircraft round through his thigh, and his father won two Distinguished Flying Crosses over Vietnam—it wasn’t originally his intention to enter the military. In fact when he left home for college, the military was the farthest thing from Harbaugh’s mind.

“I was the guy who hitchhiked around Tasmania, played guitar, and grew a beard,” he says. “But being a bum left lots of time for thinking.” He thought about his father and his



*Ken Harbaugh spent part of the summer of 2006 in Afghanistan consulting for a human rights organization. While there he bartered with a local merchant at a carpet bazaar in Mazar-e-Sharif (left). Harbaugh stayed for several days at a compound guarded by the Afghan National Police (right).*



grandfather. He decided his life was a little too comfortable, that he hadn’t paid his dues. And then he joined the Navy.

Flying, it turned out, really is in Harbaugh’s blood. He was first in his class at Officer Candidate School and when it came time to choose his assignment he opted for combat reconnaissance in an EP-3—an aircraft Harbaugh calls “fat, slow, and ugly.” But being assigned to an EP-3 would ensure that he would be gathering intelligence essential to national security, and making that kind of difference was Harbaugh’s goal.

The Navy sent him to Top Gun for intelligence pilots (affectionately referred to as “Top Geek”) and he rose to the rank of Aircraft Commander of his EP-3, responsible for a \$100 million plane and an elite crew. He played cat-and-mouse with enemy jets, flew secret missions with a price on his head, and gathered intelligence that went straight to the President.

His schedule depended on the type of intelligence he was tasked with gathering. “Days would pass where we would do literally nothing, and then for weeks on end we’d be flying to the point of exhaustion,” Harbaugh says. In between deployments, he and his crew members would train, catch up on paperwork, and work on repairing marriages so they could withstand another deployment. “It was tough, but the work was incredibly rewarding,” he adds.

Flying, though, wasn’t enough for Harbaugh. And so he wrote. He contributed articles to *Proceedings* (the Navy’s professional journal), and the U.S. Naval Institute invited him (twice) to address their annual convention. He raised more than a few eyebrows when he told the assembled admirals

and politicians what they should do differently.

When he began teaching at the Citadel, Harbaugh had more free time and his itch to write grew stronger. He started by contributing commentaries to National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered*. “It was stuff I thought the average American should know about the military,” he says. “But what a mess I made. My relationship with NPR outraged some Navy big-shots. They weren’t fellow pilots, or anyone with wartime experience. Just bureaucrats protecting their turf.”

The irony, Harbaugh points out, is that his commentaries were pro-military and drew tremendous listener feedback. Harbaugh’s decision to discuss the My Lai massacre with his students also led to more than a little consternation with the Navy brass.

Similar to Mandernach’s experience, Harbaugh’s decision to attend law school was prompted by a desire to find another entrée to public service. “From the cockpit to the classroom I have watched lawmakers write their rules and issue their orders,” Harbaugh explains. “For long enough I have been the instrument of my government’s policies. Now I will help craft them.

“I’ve placed my life in the hands of American’s politicians, and sent my Citadel students off to a war that many civilian leaders don’t understand. This country needs more lawmakers who have been shot at.” **Y**

*To listen to Ken Harbaugh’s commentaries on All Things Considered, visit [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) or read the transcripts at [www.law.yale.edu/news/Articles&Op-eds.htm](http://www.law.yale.edu/news/Articles&Op-eds.htm).*