

A Call to Serve

Bonded by shared experiences and love of country, veterans Aaron Haviland '19 and Tianyi "Tian Tian" Xin '19 bring global perspectives and leadership skills to Yale Law School.



As a small child, Aaron Haviland '19 moved from Manhattan to Haiti, traveling around the world with his family through his father's various State Department postings.

Around the same time, his classmate, Tianyi "Tian Tian" Xin '19, left Dalian, China to move to Texas with her family for a better life in the United States.

Despite these contrasting childhood experiences, both Haviland and Xin remember a strong calling to service at a very early age.

"I had always grown up knowing I wanted to serve," said Haviland, recalling how his uncle was killed in the 9/11 attacks. "I had grown up around Marine security guards at the U.S. Embassies where we lived and always looked up to them."

"I've always had a strong sense that I needed to give back to my adopted country from a very early age," recalled Xin, who grew up in Texas where her parents worked to achieve the American dream.

Xin was drawn to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, serving as an Officer in the Army upon graduation, while Haviland gravitated to the U.S. Naval Academy and ended up in the Marines. Both served in a multitude of roles in the military and happened to deploy to Afghanistan within two years of each other — Xin as an individual augmentee of the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment in 2014 and Haviland with the 3d Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment in 2012.

Immediately following their service, both students arrived in New Haven in the fall of 2016, drawn to Yale Law School's intimate community and driven by an intellectual curiosity and interest in international law.

Today, their shared experiences in the military and sense of calling to serve the country they love are what bond them here at Yale Law School, even as they engage in different interests and activities.

"Aaron is one of my favorite people at the law school. On paper, we shouldn't be friends at all," said Xin. "We had very different upbringings, we're on opposite ends of the political spectrum, and we root for competing teams in a very intense college football rivalry of Army versus Navy.

"But I respect Aaron a great deal and what I admire about him is that, at the end of the day, we can both put our differences aside and focus on our common interests in the law and on our love of country."

"Tian Tian is one of the most hard-working and well-rounded people I have ever met," said Haviland. "She always looks for common ground and makes friends with everyone, even those with whom she disagrees. Most importantly, she is an amazing friend and one of my favorite people at Yale Law School."

Their friendship embodies the relationship many veterans at the law school have formed with each other. Together through the Yale Law Veterans student group, Xin and Haviland work to come up with fun, social activities that bring student veterans together for support and a sense of community. The group helps incoming students navigate the financial aid process and keeps veterans bonded together during their time here.

"We all look out for each other," said Xin. "We're a small enough group where everyone knows each other and we've all got each other's backs."

"We all come from very different backgrounds and have different — sometimes conflicting — political and ideological beliefs," said Haviland. "Our goal, as a group, is not to push a political agenda. In fact, we go out of our way to make sure that we are not perceived as partisan. What brings us together is a shared common experience of having served our country in uniform."

YLS EXPANDING SUPPORT TO VETERANS THROUGH YELLOW RIBBON PROGRAM

Starting in 2017, Yale Law School expanded its Yellow Ribbon program to provide support to additional qualified veterans who are interested in attending.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill, or Yellow Ribbon Program, provides aid for tuition and fees towards attending both public and private educational institutions.

"It is critical that Yale Law School is doing everything possible to recruit and matriculate more veterans," said Dean Heather Gerken. "Student veterans have tremendous experiences and have made extraordinary sacrifices to serve our country. They make our community a better place and they have our full support."

Under the program, degree-granting institutions of higher learning participating in the Post-9/11 GI Bill Yellow Ribbon Program enter into an agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and choose the amount of tuition and fees that will be contributed. The VA matches that amount.

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"We have increased our contribution to 'unlimited' as of the 2017-2018 academic year, which means that a student who is 100% eligible for Post 9/11 GI Benefits will have all tuition and mandatory fees covered by Chapter 33 Tuition, Chapter 33 Yellow Ribbon match, and the YLS contribution," explained Jaqueline Outlaw, Director of Financial Aid at Yale Law School.

Tianyi Xin said she felt the move was a very positive step for the Law School to take. The Yale Law Veterans student group, which provides resources and support to other veterans at the school, is working to make sure prospective students are aware of these changes and can navigate the application process.

"The move makes Yale that much more attractive a school for veterans applying to top law schools," said Xin. "Helping to decrease the financial burden of attending law school through this change also sends a strong message to all veterans that YLS cares about and values their service and their experiences."



Tian Tian Xin '19
in Iraq, 2016

Tianyuan “Tian Tian” Xin '19

The General’s Speechwriter with a First-Degree Black Belt

At 22 years old, Tian Tian Xin’s first military assignment in the Army was not your ordinary post. Xin was commissioned to be the taekwondo platoon leader for an American military taekwondo demonstration team in the 2nd Infantry Division. In this role, her unit put on martial arts demonstrations around South Korea as a gesture of goodwill to the South Korean population.

“While I did all of the traditional platoon leader things like oversee training, manage my soldiers’ development and military readiness, and deal with the administrative duties of the platoon, I also got to train in Taekwondo,” said Xin. “I had no experience in martial arts when I arrived, but left with a first-degree black belt!”

After that assignment, Xin was deployed to Afghanistan with the 75th Ranger Regiment, serving in the role of an intelligence officer.

There Xin was responsible for quickly assessing intelligence from various sources to identify the “bad guys on the battlefield,” and help advise more senior military commanders how to handle the enemy. She remembers sitting in front of a computer screen quickly sifting through critical intelligence while also watching things play out on a television screen as soldiers conducted raids on compounds.

Her last assignment was serving as speech writer for the three-star general who commanded troops at Fort Hood, during which she was deployed briefly to Baghdad as a member of the military coalition to defeat ISIL.

“In that position, I got a bird’s eye view of how the major military operation to defeat ISIL managed tricky internal Iraqi politics, the sometimes even trickier politics within the American national security apparatus, and the incredible bravery of the Iraqi and Kurdish forces we fought alongside,” said Xin.

Xin prepared for these remarkable experiences in the military through her training at West Point, which she was drawn to after meeting a graduate during a summer program at Yale. She remembers feeling a need to give back to the country that opened up so many doors to her and her family.

Xin moved to the U.S. from China when she was four years old, and her parents — both graduate students at the time — struggled to get by at first.

“For several years, my mom waited tables at a Chinese restaurant to support our entire family, and we bought food from the slightly expired but cheaper vegetables bin at the grocery store,” recalled Xin. “But even during those tough times, my parents never let me forget how privileged I was to live in America. To them, this was the land of freedom and opportunity, and that has proven to be the case a thousand times over.”

Coming straight from Iraq, Xin arrived in New Haven in 2016, drawn to Yale Law School for its small class size and collegial atmosphere. Ever since, Xin has been involved in a diverse array of activities, including Yale Law Women, the *Yale Law Journal*, the Asian Pacific American Law Students Association, the Center for Global Legal Challenges, Yale Law Veterans, and the Rule of Law Clinic. She is particularly interested in national security, holding a unique perspective on how things work in this realm.

“My experiences in the military have helped me appreciate the very tangible consequences of the legal and policy choices that we discuss in class,” said Xin. “I still have many friends and loved ones in the military, and even theoretical ‘what if’ scenarios about foreign policy or national security laws can have direct impacts on people I care about. I think when you have skin in the game, you no longer have the luxury of theorizing about hypothetical scenarios in a vacuum. And that has forced me to think more critically about the second- and third-order effects of decisions we talk about in class.”

One of the things she loves about the Law School is how many of her classmates similarly bring their “rich professional and personal experiences to the classroom.”

“Yale Law School is famous for its legal theory, but the diverse backgrounds of my classmates very much ground our classroom discussions, even the more theoretical ones, in the real world,” explained Xin.

With a long list of impressive accomplishments already behind her, Xin is only just getting started. She hopes to pursue work in national security after graduation and knows that heading back to serving the country she loves could certainly be along her path.

“YLS has some wonderful professors and programs that have helped me explore my interest in national security,” said Xin. “Even though I’m no longer wearing the uniform, I don’t think my tenure working for Uncle Sam is over yet. I’d eventually like to go back to serving my country in some capacity.”

Aaron Haviland '19

From State Department Kid to Marine Officer

Even before joining the military, Aaron Haviland had already traveled the world.

As a child, his family routinely moved across the globe as a result of his father's job. During his childhood, Haviland lived in Bangladesh, Senegal, Pakistan, and India.

Through it all, he knew that he would one day wear a U.S. military uniform, feeling a sense of calling, particularly after he lost an uncle in the 9/11 attacks. In 2005, he attended the U.S. Naval Academy after which he was awarded a scholarship for two years at Cambridge to study international relations.

From there, Haviland went through the Basic School in Quantico, Virginia, where all new Marine Officers learn foundational skills like leadership, navigation, platoon tactics, and operational planning. Following that, he was assigned to be an Adjutant at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, managing the administrative section for a battalion of 750 to 1,100 Marines. In this role, he oversaw personnel matters, maintained unit orders and policies, and handled correspondence and awards.

During this time, Haviland also coordinated all legal affairs for his unit, including 60 administrative separations, 20 brig confinements, and 30 courts-martial for crimes ranging from drug abuse to sexual assault.

"On legal issues, I had to be my commanding officer's go-to guy," said Haviland. "I coordinated with the on-base lawyers for all our courts-martial. It was a very interesting experience and was one of the things that got me interested in law."

Haviland said while he never expected to be doing this kind of detailed, administrative work in the military, it gave him a true appreciation for the broader mission.

"I realized that the success of the big efforts never comes down to one person and it's often a lot of people doing very menial tasks that don't feel like a big deal at the time," said Haviland. "When you sign up wanting to serve, you have this idea that I'm going go out and change the world and it's going to be like the movies, but you find out it's a lot of nitty gritty grunt work. Seeing how all those fine details come together and how much it matters is humbling."

Deployed to Helmand Province, Afghanistan, from October 2012 to May 2013, Haviland took on even more managerial tasks, supervising the accountability of more than 800 military personnel, 50 civilian linguists, and 400 classified computer hard drives spread across seven forward operating bases. For his work, he was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for exemplary service that contributed to the successful closure or turnover to Afghan forces of five military bases. He was also awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal for service in Camp Lejeune.

Once completing his service, Haviland said he was ready to engage in an intellectual community like Yale Law School, and recalls being thrilled when he got in.

"I liked the idea of a small community where people are interested in thinking about complex legal issues," said Haviland.

Haviland has been making the most of his time here, finding himself most interested in constitutional law, international law, and war powers issues. He is on the board of the Yale Law School Chapter of the Federalist Society, and is involved with the Catholic Law Student Association, the Yale Law Veterans group, and the Center for Global Legal Challenges at Yale Law School.

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AARON HAVILAND

This coming summer, Haviland has a position lined up working at Sidley Austin and plans to clerk after graduation before joining a firm in Washington, D.C.

As a decorated military officer and accomplished scholar, Haviland could take any number of paths from law school. He thinks about one day returning to serve in the government. But for now, Haviland is focused on the tasks at hand, understanding that just like in the military, every experience counts.

"In the military I learned the value of gaining experience," said Haviland. "I've realized there is a lot to gain in any job, even if it doesn't seem like the dream job. Eventually you will find out you learned a lot." 🍀



Aaron Haviland '19 in the airport in Bangor, Maine in October 2012, about to leave for Afghanistan.