



A Foundation of Service Student Veterans Enhance the Yale Law School Community

BY MICHELLE FIELSTRA



Veterans are matriculating at Yale Law School in greater numbers than ever before, bringing with them a wealth of knowledge and leadership experience and enriching the community in classrooms, clinics, and beyond. Since 2017, the number of veterans attending Yale Law School has more than tripled thanks to the School's increased recruiting and participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program, which helps veterans pay for tuition that the post-9/11 GI Bill doesn't cover. In the J.D. class of 2025, one in 14 students is a veteran, with experiences spanning across all military branches. Increasing the number of veterans at Yale Law School is part of the overarching goal to bring the most capable and wide-ranging students to campus.

"I'm extraordinarily proud to have so many veterans in our midst. Each has a remarkable story, and I'm inspired by their service to our country and this Law School," said Dean Heather K. Gerken. "It is a privilege to work with them and to learn from them."

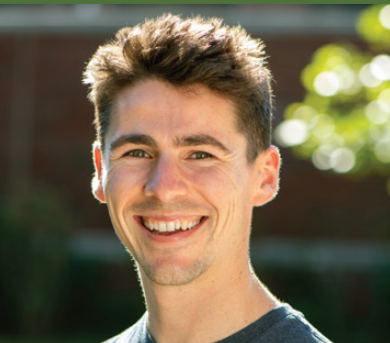
Yale Law Report spoke to six 1L student veterans to learn about their military service, their paths to Yale Law School, and what they hope to accomplish while they are here. Read their full profiles at law.yale.edu/student-veterans.



Protecting People on Our Coasts

Joe Sullivan-Springhetti '25,
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Coast Guard

Joe Sullivan-Springhetti joined Yale Law School's Class of 2025 for the same reason he joined the U.S. Coast Guard — he hopes to make a positive impact in people's lives. That's what he was



able to do during his nine years as a Coast Guard officer during four tours of duty in Tampa, Florida; Juneau, Alaska; Washington, D.C.; and Ketchikan, Alaska.

Sullivan-Springhetti always found the Coast Guard's life-saving mission deeply appealing. After graduating from the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, Sullivan-Springhetti's

primary job was driving Coast Guard ships. The highlight of his seafaring tours was captaining a ship based in Ketchikan, Alaska. Sailing the Inside Passage, a scenic, coastal route of 500 miles that stretches from the Juneau, Alaska, region southward to Seattle, he discovered just how integral the Coast Guard was to the life of the community. "Alaska's Inside Passage is a part of the country that is so dependent on the Coast Guard and on the fishing communities there," he said. "People are on the water in an area with very limited government otherwise; other resources are often constrained. Feeling like we were making a difference was always really gratifying."

Sullivan-Springhetti received one particularly memorable mayday call from a fishing boat that had been stranded on a pinnacle of rock as the tide rapidly receded, threatening to roll the crew into the near-freezing ocean. The fishing boat's crew had already donned their immersion suits when Sullivan-Springhetti's ship arrived to rescue them, taking them onboard and then stabilizing their boat until the tide came in enough to be towed to shore.

Determination Has a Ripple Effect

Hillary Browning '25
Mass Communications Specialist, U.S. Navy

"I hiked Mt. Fuji during a typhoon," Hillary Browning '25 recalled of her time serving in the U.S. Navy. "Mostly by accident, but also because I am stubborn."

She and her then-boyfriend had planned to climb the iconic mountain with some Japanese Self-Defense Force sailors, but when they arrived at the base, they realized the weather was deteriorating quickly. "The employees at every checkpoint kept asking us to please turn around, but we pressed on."



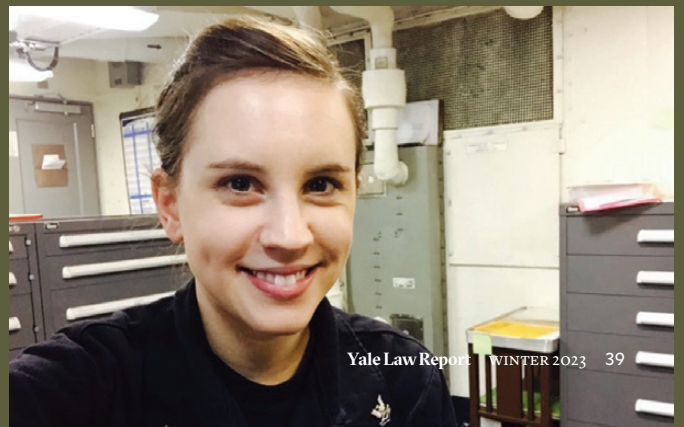
The same determination that allowed her to summit Japan's highest mountain also brought her to Yale Law School.

Growing up in New Braunfels, Texas, Browning wanted to attend college after high school but her family couldn't afford it, so she enlisted in the Navy for the opportunities it would provide.

Browning was deployed to Japan and Afghanistan during her six years as a Navy journalist (called a Mass Communication Specialist). She also spent a year at sea stationed on the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower. While serving as editor-in-chief of the ship's daily newspaper, she wrote a piece on the ship's commanding officer that won the Navy's award for Feature Story of the Year.

While an undergraduate at Yale, Browning took a class taught by a Connecticut judge that focused on the First Amendment. The professor and the course material sparked her interest in law school and the field of public interest law.

"I applied for the fall 2021 admissions cycle and was waitlisted," she said. "This did not deter me. In fact, it buoyed me. I anticipated being flat-out rejected from Yale Law School. I would gleefully tell people who asked, 'I got waitlisted at Yale!'" Encouraged to try again, Browning applied for the fall 2022 cycle and was admitted. "It seems crazy to think that five years ago, I was just starting to think about law school as an idea, and now I'm at YLS," Browning observed.



Navigating the Final Frontier

Kevin Beauchemin '25

Major, U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force

When he graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy, Kevin Beauchemin '25 set his sights above the storied “wild blue yonder,” into the realm of intelligence and space.

Selected to be an Intelligence Officer, Beauchemin was first sent to get his master's degree at the Harvard Kennedy School, where his master's thesis focused on space policy. “I wrote about how a lot of the existing laws and international treaties don't provide a suitable legal foundation for the world we live in now, because they were designed around two or three spacefaring nations, and now high schoolers can build and launch small satellites. The current legal frameworks are not sufficient to grapple with the problems that arise,” he explained.

From the theoretical, Beauchemin plunged into the deeply practical at Air Mobility Command in Illinois — analyzing all streams of intelligence (human, signals, geospatial) to decide,

for example, where to land state-of-the-art aircraft full of American soldiers inside combat zones. Next he attended the elite Air Force Weapons School, then joined a unit in Air Force Space Command at Buckley Air Force Base — now Buckley Space Force Base — in Aurora, Colorado.

An act of Congress had

converted Air Force Space Command into the newest branch of the armed forces, the United States Space Force, and Beauchemin had been asked to help with the transition. “Since I was in the intelligence field and had space experience, I was pulled in, and I stayed for a few years until the Space Force could build up its own corps of intelligence personnel,” he explained.



Leading People in the Field

Margo Darragh '25

Captain, U.S. Marine Corps

Educated at the U.S. Naval Academy to serve as an officer in the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Marine Corps, Margo Darragh '25 chose the Marines because, as she said, “I knew I liked being part of a team, and I wanted to work with people.” Darragh was drawn to the Marines' role as our nation's “rapid reaction force” — the teams on the ground providing aid in response to humanitarian disasters, for example.

As active duty approached, Darragh considered which Marine Corps career most interested her, unaware that certain paths were closed to women. Then suddenly, they weren't — in January 2016, just a few months before her graduation, the Department of Defense opened all military occupations and positions to women. Darragh became the first female combat engineer officer assigned to one of the formerly restricted ground combat units. In her role as platoon commander, Darragh led a team of 50 enlisted Marines through their training in California and their deployment in Southeast Asia.

Meanwhile, Darragh followed the news and issues she cared about back home, including the escalating opioid epidemic, which has devastated her hometown outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and communities across the country. While she found her six years in the Marine Corps extremely fulfilling, she said, “I knew that I didn't want to be a bystander the next time that something like OxyContin hits the market.” Inspired by the recent successful litigation against opioid manufacturers and distributors, Darragh said that hearing stories of attorneys general “who are getting justice for parents who have lost children, and for children who have lost parents” made her want to pursue law as her new sphere of impact.



Shattering a Glass Ceiling

Briana “Bri” Thompson ’25

Major, U.S. Air Force

Briana “Bri” Thompson ’25 had not planned to serve in the military at all, let alone fly planes. Once her heart was set on attending American University, a private college in Washington, D.C., Thompson reconsidered her stance and ultimately joined the Air Force’s ROTC program, which covered tuition and books in addition to paying cadets a stipend.

Looking back, Thompson feels thankful that she took the leap in becoming an aviator, because it led her to her favorite job, which she calls “the best-kept secret in the Air Force” — the special ops role of Combat Aviation Advisor (CAA).

A multifaceted and competitive job, CAAs are “air commandos” who “assess, train, advise, assist, and accompany foreign aviation forces, [enabling] friendly, partner, and allied forces to employ and sustain their own combat-oriented airpower resources.”

Thompson’s biggest challenge during her service as a CAA came from within the Air Force. When she was hired, there were only three women in a community of 150, and at one point, she was the

only woman in her unit. She said she kept asking her superiors if she could deploy to their Middle East partners — Lebanon or Jordan, for example — and she was repeatedly told that “they were not ready to fly with women.” Dissatisfied with that answer, Thompson researched and could not find evidence of this position from the Middle Eastern partners, the embassy, or Special Operations Command. So, with five other women, Thompson drafted a white paper and brought it to their leadership.

“We weren’t accusatory; we were professional. We asked in good faith and for good reason: ‘Can you explain this policy, and can you explain the process for evaluating it in the future?’ and also, ‘Why did you hire us if you didn’t want us to do this job?’” Thompson remembered. “And no one had an answer, and it essentially changed overnight.”



The “Snowball Effect” of Mentoring

Devin Froseth ’25

Captain, U.S. Army

Devin Froseth ’25 enlisted as “the most junior rank possible — private.” His first job was as an air defense systems maintainer who helped with the servicing of missile launching stations and radar systems in Okinawa, Japan. “Then I got very lucky as a young soldier,” he said. He found two great mentors, officers who helped him to realize that he had potential and if he demonstrated initiative, he could earn a college education and achieve other personal goals. The officers, Lance and Laura, helped the 19-year-old Froseth with the application process for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he was accepted. This encouragement and college acceptance, Froseth says, “had a snowball effect on the rest of my life.”

After West Point, Froseth was stationed in Germany with a military intelligence unit that worked closely with the United States’s European allies and partners. He later moved to New Haven to manage the region’s Army recruiting. He said, “Watching some of my subordinates and peers get promoted ahead of schedule or receive awards that they worked for and knowing that I had a part in helping them succeed — or overcome adversity — is really what drove me as an officer.”

When he began to think about how he might next serve society, he was struck by the parallels between his work as an Army captain and the work of lawyering. “As an officer, a lot of what you do is advising: understanding situations and finding solutions, and then advising a commander on the best course of action to take,” Froseth said. “The law is similar in a lot of ways: you’re advising a client in solving difficult problems.”

As he researched law schools, Froseth said Yale Law School’s reputation and tradition stood out to him. “The U.S. Military Academy is central to the profession of arms. I saw Yale as analogous for law,” Froseth said. “I chose Yale Law School because I wanted to be as close as I could be to the center of the legal profession.”

