



THE POWER OF FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Like many high school seniors, current Marine Corps Capt. Briana Allen '13 never would have accurately predicted her life ten years after earning her college degree. Allen grew up in West St. Paul, MN, graduated from Henry Sibley High School (now Two Rivers High School) and started her college search on the later side, deciding on St. Scholastica with the intention to study Occupational Therapy (OT) and play basketball. "I picked St. Scholastica after touring some colleges. I liked the school community, and I liked getting to be part of that team,"

she said. "The basketball players I met had this culture where their personalities just meshed better than some of the other schools that I visited." As Allen worked her way through the OT program, she noticed her psychology courses ignited an interest and curiosity she could not ignore, so she ultimately switched majors to reflect her new direction. After earning her bachelor's degree in Psychology, she continued her studies in graduate school. Her surprising career pivot came while working to fulfill

hours as a school psychologist. Allen shared, "During that time, I actually ended up in a career counselor position while I shadowed the school psychologist. It was funny because, as I was doing the career counselor thing and helping students figure out what they wanted to do beyond high school, I took notes for myself about different opportunities. One of the things that the Marine Corps does is invite educators — whether teachers, coaches, counselors or others — to a workshop for a week to teach about opportunities within the Marines. And that fire I had when I

switched to psychology was the same as when I was at that workshop. I immediately dropped from my master's program and hopped on the Marine Corps train."

Joining the Marines, Allen was pleasantly surprised to connect past experiences, skills and interests with her new work as an officer. "I was so excited. I grew up with boy cousins, and I always felt I had to compete with them, so I pride myself on my athleticism and how I keep up with my physical fitness. I loved getting to have a job where this matters," she explained. "I worked as a mental health practitioner for five years before joining, and I just wasn't as excited about sitting behind a desk and the mental toll that it takes when you're trying to assist others with their mental health needs. So when this door opened to the Marine Corps, and I saw how great a fit it would be on several different levels, I was immediately excited. The fit ended up being even better than I had imagined; I use my psychology background all the time."

To help keep the vast amount of information and details she manages as a logistics officer from becoming too stressful, Allen taps into her love of learning and embraces the challenges head-on. As an officer, she is expected to know all the areas and functions of logistics even while recognizing the impossibility of grasping every detail. "Because I truly love learning, it just becomes fulfilling work. It's very, very, very busy. You have very limited resources and you have to find ways to be creative and make things work."

The best part of her job, though, is the people. Allen shared, "The thing I really love about the Marine Corps is the Marines. While a logistician has a lot to know, I rely heavily on the Marines in my charge and those who support me. They are the subject matter experts who allow me, as a logistics officer, to make sound decisions."

Allen also recognizes unique skills and strengths she can use to support her staff. "I think as an officer and leader, my specialty is noticing when a Marine is not behaving the same or is in a different mood because something may be going on in their personal life. I'm able to pay attention to their mental health needs and make adjustments where we can due to my background in psychology and previous jobs in mental health," she said.

Another pleasant surprise? A new opportunity to play basketball. Not long after joining the Marines, Allen learned about the basketball team but could not

participate for her first few years due to an injury. Fortunately, circumstances aligned this past fall, and Allen secured a spot on the roster of the Marine Corps Women's team.

Teams have two weeks to practice before playing in the Armed Forces tournament, where the four branches compete for the championship. When the Marine Corps women's team came in last place at the tournament, Allen expected her short but sweet reunion with basketball to come to a close, but instead, she was selected for the U.S. Armed Forces Women's Basketball Team, which competed in the SHAPE International Basketball Tournament held in Mons, Belgium November 26 to December 3, 2023.

Allen shared: "That tournament had its own challenges. It was easier on the Marine Corps team because, even though we hadn't met until we played together, we were all Marines and that bond formed almost immediately. On the U.S. team, it was a little harder to get that chemistry. In the end, we went undefeated in that tournament and won the gold medal. Overall, it was amazing. I was super grateful to have the opportunity to play against other countries and learn about their military branches and their styles of basketball. It was very, very cool."

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Hindsight often gives the illusion of an easy life path, but Allen harbored doubts along the way. Starting her basketball career late, her coaches told her she would not likely play at the collegiate level. After graduating with her psychology degree, she experienced some regret for changing course from OT. When she decided to join the Marines, her family was not initially on board, which made for a difficult transition. Additionally, she sustained an injury, setting her back two years and giving her ground to make up with her peers. Through it all, the knowledge she was pursuing something she was passionate about and had an affinity for helped her power through the bouts of uncertainty.



Another source of encouragement has come from practicing the Benedictine values within community. "Whether in the classroom or on the court, when we honed in on those core values and took the time to take them seriously, I really appreciated it," Allen said. "That experience transitioned me to the Marine Corps values, which made it easier; I had that foundation built at St. Scholastica and it matured me. I think it made me a better, more well-rounded person."

When she commissioned, Allen was initially planning for a 20-year military career; now, she is open to whichever path is the right fit. In the meantime, she takes her role as an officer seriously and is committed to her work, whether at her desk or with her colleagues and direct reports. For her next adventure, Allen was selected to become a Marine Officer Instructor at the University of South Carolina. She is excited to go "full circle" by returning to teach and mentor the next group of young Marine Officers.

"Knowing that, as an officer, I have an effect on so many Marines, it is very important to me to know where my moral compass is and to make sure that I am setting a good example," Allen said. "I like to remind them that these values are your moral compass and to keep them in the back of your mind when things are stressful, busy or chaotic. Let your values be your guide and your compass."

