

# COLORADO BUSINESS REVIEW

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# Veterans Show Strength Serving in Private Sector

*Christian P. Anschutz*



*Peter Doyle, president and CEO of Hirsh Precision Products, standing in the Hirsh Precision Products Facility in Boulder, CO.*

When Peter Doyle first transitioned to civilian life after nine years in uniform, he felt nervous and out of place.

He lacked confidence that his military experience would provide the transferable skills required to succeed in the private sector. He couldn't have been more wrong.

What made the difference is that he relied on a key trait he brought as a veteran: grit.

"I was totally committed to making my transition successful. That commitment provided the resolve, the initiative, and the adaptability I needed for the journey," Doyle recalls.

Doyle earned a Leeds MBA in 2011 and a master's in financial accounting in 2012 and now works as president and CEO of Hirsh Precision Products, a precision machining and manufacturing company in Boulder that serves medical, aerospace, and other high-tech sectors. The company's production has remained strong during the pandemic in part because it has been making equipment used to treat patients with COVID-19.

Doyle's success story offers just one example of how veterans are leveraging their leadership and other skills in the private sector to drive the economic recovery – all with the help of a University of Colorado Boulder education.

Certainly, some combat veterans need physical and emotional support. However, painting all veterans with a broad brush as victims or as broken does them a disservice and devalues the strengths they bring to higher education and the workforce.

Captain Stew Elliott, U.S. Navy (retired), says he had to dispel the veteran-as-victim perception on campus when he became the director of Veteran and Military Affairs at CU Boulder after serving nearly 28 years as a Navy SEAL.

Now, he notes, student veterans who go through his department's Veteran Academic Bridge program, which helps them adapt to life and academics at CU Boulder, generally outperform their non-veteran student peers on key indicators like grade point average and retention.

CU veteran alumni offer employers the benefits of a CU Boulder education that is layered on top of lived experience, leadership training, and soft skills learned in the military. Even before pursuing a college degree, veterans may have had the opportunity to earn high security clearances and guard our nation's secrets, operate our most advanced weapons systems, or take responsibility for the well-being and morale of hundreds or thousands of troops.



**Leeds School of Business**  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of the CBR focuses on military veterans and their transition to private and public employment. The articles were written by business and education leaders as well as veterans themselves. This issue quantifies the size of the veteran component of the labor force nationally and in Colorado, relates the experience of two employers with veteran laden workforces, and describes the transition process and programs for veterans.

Our next issue will present a review of our 2021 Business Economic Outlook. Look for it in January in your inbox.

Please contact me directly at 303-492-1147 with any comments or questions.

—Richard Wobbekind

“Veterans are exceptional,” notes Doyle, who earned his bachelor’s degree at the U.S. Air Force Academy before getting his two master’s degrees at Leeds.

“They have training and experience in teamwork, personal discipline, leadership and follow-through that would rival any corporate program.”

He adds: “My time in the Air Force encouraged me to live with purpose. It taught me I was responsible for my actions and the importance of living out my principles. In addition, I learned the rewards of contributing to something larger than myself.”

“The Air Force also allowed me to observe and work with some outstanding men and women – leaders above and below me in the organization’s hierarchy. My faith and my experience with these early mentors have been an invaluable mooring in tricky leadership situations,” Doyle says.

Beyond principles of personal and professional leadership, Doyle says veterans also typically bring a strong grounding in:

- large organizational dynamics
- governance best practices
- project management
- presentation/communication skills

Higher education may play a key role in their successful move to the private sector.

I recently had the opportunity to talk with a very sharp veteran who described her transition to the business world. She noted she needed to adapt her vocabulary, for example. PL no longer stood for platoon leader – it meant profit and loss. M&A was not a reference to the Middle East and Africa – it now stood for mergers and acquisitions.

But these are easy adaptations when veterans come to the private sector with other more fundamental traits. So, with the help of institutions like CU, these talented Coloradans add to the well-educated workforce that makes Colorado so appealing to those who may invest in expanding operations here, including the military itself.

Colorado already has a strong military presence, and many veterans choose

to stay here after they get a taste of our enviable lifestyle and fertile economy.

Colorado Springs is the interim location for U.S. Space Command and has a strong case to become its permanent home. The Space Command oversees military satellites and plans for potential conflict in the earth’s orbit. This is a critical role: Whether we know it or not, all of us rely on the satellites that support, for example, telecommunications and financial systems.

Keeping the Space Command’s 1,400 troops is key, but the benefits stretch far beyond that. Landing Space Command permanently would create a surrounding cluster of economic activity and jobs with aerospace and defense companies relocating here to support Space Command’s high-tech operations. The potential economic benefit could be a modern-day Pike’s Peak Gold Rush.

This halo effect of economic investment would build on Colorado’s already strong position in these industries, which depend on our state’s well-educated workforce.

Hiring veterans brings tangible benefits to businesses, and it is important to step back and recognize that our nation’s free market system exists because young men and women have put on uniforms and fought for our way of life. That is a contribution to our economy that is hard to quantify but one that we must never forget.

Building a path from active-duty service to the hallowed halls of our state’s best higher education institutions to the corner offices of our most successful companies is a fitting way to honor the service of our nation’s veterans.

Colorado is represented at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center by a statute of John L. “Jack” Swigert Jr., a CU-Boulder alumnus who went on to become an Air Force combat pilot in Korea, an astronaut on the Apollo 13 NASA mission, and then was elected to represent Colorado’s new 6th Congressional District before dying of cancer.

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# Belonging at Ball: Hiring and Investing in Veterans

Charles Johnson

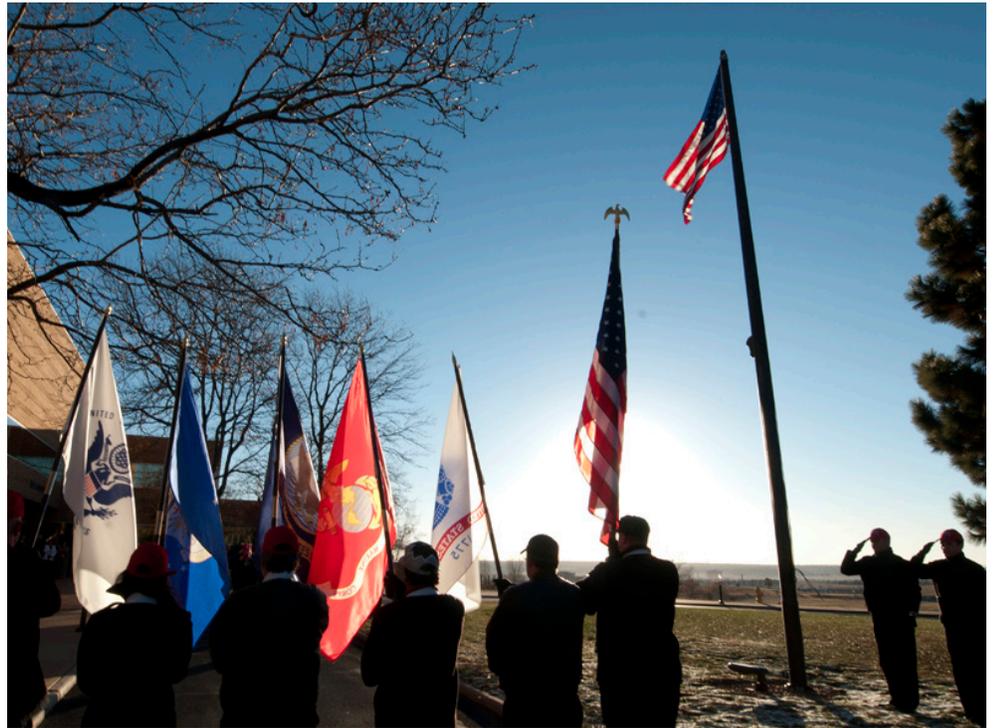
Each year, tens of thousands of military personnel complete their tour of duty, retire, or transition out of active service. The vast majority return to the civilian labor pool, representing a rich and diverse source of talent for companies. While there is high demand for the experience and skills that veterans bring to the table, the transition from military to civilian is never easy and it has become even more challenging in the era of COVID.

Due to the challenges that veterans face in good economic conditions and bad, Ball Corporation has placed a high priority on helping service men and women navigate this complex and emotional transition, starting well before they separate from the military.

Make no mistake – attracting and recruiting veterans is a valuable piece to our company's growth strategy. However, those are secondary to simply serving those who served our country by providing guidance, helping make connections, and building fruitful relationships. We love it when veterans decide to join our family, but we are just as happy when they land jobs with competitors or with companies outside of our respective industries.

There is a good chance many of the veterans we work with will not end up at Ball. The competition for these individuals is fierce, and for good reason. We are fortunate to be in a state with a robust military infrastructure that includes six bases and more than 34,000 active duty men and women. But we also happen to be in a state with many companies that will benefit by employing these individuals, including numerous companies in the aerospace and defense industry.

Like many of these employers, Ball places high value on the skills, experience, and leadership that former



Veterans Day Color Guard at Ball Aerospace Headquarters. Photo courtesy of Ball Corporation.

military service members bring to the table. Their unique experience is particularly valuable to one of our businesses, Ball Aerospace, which works heavily with the branches where these men and women served. Veterans' insight into the missions, processes, and the unique language of the military serves them and the organization well.

Stevan Richards, a senior talent acquisition specialist at Ball Aerospace, works directly with veterans throughout their transition and attests to the fact that these individuals bring far more to the organization than security clearances.

According to Richards, "From a diversity standpoint, the pool of transitioning veterans is all-inclusive. These individuals come from all walks of life, representing a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, genders,

religions, races, and nationalities. Moreover, they bring a diverse set of translatable, practical, hands-on experience, leadership skills, and discipline that is unique to military service and extremely valuable in the private sector and our company in particular."

Despite being equipped with in-demand skills and experience, the transition for those separating from the military is far from easy. Many quickly discover that a long list of job offers are not awaiting them, even in the best of times. They still have to put work into a job search to uncover the best opportunities and build connections that will lead to the successful transition and employment in the civilian job market.

Jared Ruger, a senior human resources generalist at Ball, remembers what it's like to make that transition. After completing

eight years of service in the Army in 2015, he joined Ball in 2018 after earning a bachelor's degree.

"I struggled in the job-search process because there were so many variables to consider," Ruger said. "How do my skills transfer? What level of job should I apply for? What companies would I want to work for? Who am I when I am no longer Sergeant Ruger? What stories should I tell or not tell? I had to research, explore different organizations, and build a diverse network of supporters to help me answer these questions during the transition."

Data from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs reveals that nearly 200,000 service members transition from the military back to their civilian communities each year. Only five percent of these individuals retire or do not look for a job, according to a 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center. Only about one-quarter of veterans had a civilian job waiting for them upon leaving active duty. The remaining 70 percent enter civilian life as job seekers.

Finding employment is among the most significant transition challenges facing veterans, according to a 2015 study by Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans & Military Families. Of course, it is not the only challenge. Others identified by the study include navigating VA programs, benefits, and services (60 percent); adjusting to civilian culture (41 percent); addressing financial issues (40 percent); and applying military-learned skills to civilian life (39 percent).

These myriad issues make the transition to civilian life complex, stressful and, at times, frustrating. Ball has made a commitment to helping service members navigate these choppy waters by trying to be active partners to these men and women throughout the process.

For example, we are regular participants in the Buckley Air Force Base Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Networking Panel. Held monthly for separating retiring service members, the panel of representatives from area employers, including Ball, provide



*Ball employees attend annual Memorial Day event. Photo courtesy of Ball Corporation.*

guidance on everything from culture fit to negotiation. Ball also partners with Onward to Opportunity (O2O), a program designed to support transitioning service members, spouses, National Guard/Reserve, and veterans with a path to certification and employment in information technology, human resources, or project management.

In addition to our involvement in TAP and O2O programs, Ball hosts Civilian Career Preparation classes. Our Veterans Ball Resource Group (VBRG) and Abilities Ball Resource Group (ABRG) started these classes in 2018 to provide veterans pursuing civilian careers information on interviewing skills and advice; job-seeking information and insight from hiring managers; employees who have already made the transition; and from members of the VBRG. These are open to any veteran or transitioning service members—not just those applying to Ball.

Ball's latest initiative is participation in the Department of Defense SkillBridge Program, which is led by the Aerospace business and allows for a current servicemember to work at a civilian company for up to six months before he or she separates to develop the skills necessary to effectively transition. The service member's branch of service continues to pay, making it a fantastic win-win for the soon-to-transition service

member and the employer that is able to hire skilled labor at no cost for the first six months of the "internship" while providing placement and hands-on training for the candidate.

Of course, the transition process for veterans does not end upon finding employment. Our Veterans Ball Resource Group (VBRG) was established to provide opportunities to build community and camaraderie for veterans and non-veterans within our organization.

"The VBRG is a great resource for former service members to share experiences, find support and networking opportunities, and maintain the sense of community and service that is so prevalent in the military," said Keli Jones, an operations manager in our Aerospace business, an Air Force veteran, and VBRG co-lead. "We are always trying to expand its value and effectiveness, and, in that spirit, we are developing a mentorship program for incoming veterans, as well as a National Guard & Reserve toolkit for those who continue to serve."

There is a reason that many of the veterans we help through the transition process end up joining our company. Veterans, many of whom maintain a strong sense of teamwork and community, find that their values and priorities align perfectly with our corporate culture and moral compass. Companies like Ball, where everyone is encouraged to be their authentic selves and where high value is placed on diversity of ideas, backgrounds, and experiences, will become magnets for veterans – recognizing that the transition process starts long before separation and continues well after. The companies that embody this will create a home for veterans that will benefit them, as well as the entire company. 

*Charles Johnson is senior director of Diversity and Inclusion for Ball Corporation. To learn more about Ball on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/ball/>). For career opportunities, visit <https://www.ball.com/na/about-ball/careers>.*

# Veteran and Military Affairs Academic Bridge Program

*Kristina Spaeth*



*First students to attend the Bridge program in summer 2017. Photo courtesy of Amy Westfeldt.*

In August of 2017, the Veteran and Military Affairs (VMA) office at CU Boulder launched a unique experiment: a two-week transition program specifically designed for student veterans exiting the military and transitioning to CU Boulder.

Retired Navy Capt. Stewart Elliott had taken over leadership of VMA in 2013 and quickly hired an advisor from Academic Affairs to focus on the academic success of CU Boulder's growing student veteran population. This new advisor was tasked with developing and implementing an academic bridge program to enhance the success and retention of incoming veteran students.

In developing the program, VMA staff studied the very few programs offered to transitioning veterans around the country. For those that did exist, most did not foster an intentional connection to the university. By contrast, the VMA Summer Bridge program at CU Boulder was developed intentionally to introduce new student veterans to faculty, staff, and peers who would support and work alongside them during their academic career.

Additionally, the program placed great emphasis on academic preparation. The average veteran transitioning to higher education has been out of a school

environment for at least four years, having most commonly gone into military service directly out of high school. Many veterans who choose CU Boulder do so for the highly regarded programs in business and engineering, or in STEM majors such as physics and integrative physiology. Thus, addressing the gap in academic preparation was a clear objective from the outset.

Supported by funding from private donors in the local community, the first cohort of 19 students attended the two-week program in August 2017. The students spent each morning working on math and writing skills,



First students to attend the Bridge program in the summer of 2017. Photo courtesy of Amy Westfeldt.

taught by instructors from CU Boulder's Program for Writing and Rhetoric and the Department of Mathematics. The instructors introduced students to software platforms used in classes and helped students define their strengths in these foundational areas while moving the needle on academic preparation.

During the middle portion of the day, representatives from specific offices around campus visited to discuss topics relevant to the student veteran experience, including financial aid, the psychology of transition, academic skill development, and using the library. A highlight of the program was a CU Boulder faculty panel with highly distinguished scholars, which included Dr. Patricia Limerick, Center of the American West and former Colorado State Historian; Dr. Todd Gleeson, Integrative Physiology, former Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; and Dr. Ken Anderson, Computer Science, Department Chair.

Upon completion of the program, the students were provided a \$500 stipend to help with their living expenses during the summer.

Feedback and results were positive from the start. In the follow-up survey, one student stated, "I would have spent the first semester in Boulder isolated and alone, learning the ropes in a new town, but because of the bridge program, before school even started I had a strong network of friends and people to turn to. I still hang out with and have a group chat with almost every member of the bridge program."

After the first year, 100% of participants stayed for their second semester; by fall of 2020, 90% were still working toward their degree or had graduated. Grade point averages have been equally impressive – the average GPA at the end of the first semester was 3.31 (an honors-qualifying mark) and has remained above 3.3 three years later.

An unanticipated but equally gratifying outcome has been the sense of community that the students in each cohort have developed. For example, students in the original 2017 cohort became roommates in subsequent years, participated on an intramural team together, and held "Friendsgiving" with one another. They still keep in contact and regularly volunteer to assist in subsequent bridge programs and in leadership roles within the VMA office.

Following on its success in the first year, the program has expanded each year – to 34 students in August 2018 and 49 students in August 2019. In January 2020, a one-week version of the program was created to serve students starting at CU Boulder midyear. Retention remains well over 90% for all program participants, and 100% of participants say they would recommend it to future incoming veterans. Further, the program's success and potential for growth have attracted both corporate and philanthropic donors; in 2019, The Anschutz Foundation and Phillips 66 both contributed to sustaining and expanding the bridge program.

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 presented significant challenges to

running the August 2020 version of the VMA Summer Bridge program. However, incoming students demonstrated enthusiasm for its continuation, and VMA received authorization from university leadership to host the program in person.

The August 2020 VMA Summer Bridge program was the only in-person program held on the CU Boulder campus during the month of August. Instructors and students adjusted to sessions held outdoors, and significant portions of the program were moved to Zoom and other online platforms. The Veteran and Military Affairs team looks forward to tracking the successful transition of this newest group of student veterans, as well as continuing to expand the bridge program to more students in the future. 🍷

*Kristina Spaeth is a Veteran Academic Advisor at the University of Colorado Boulder, and may be contacted at [kristina.spaeth@colorado.edu](mailto:kristina.spaeth@colorado.edu).*

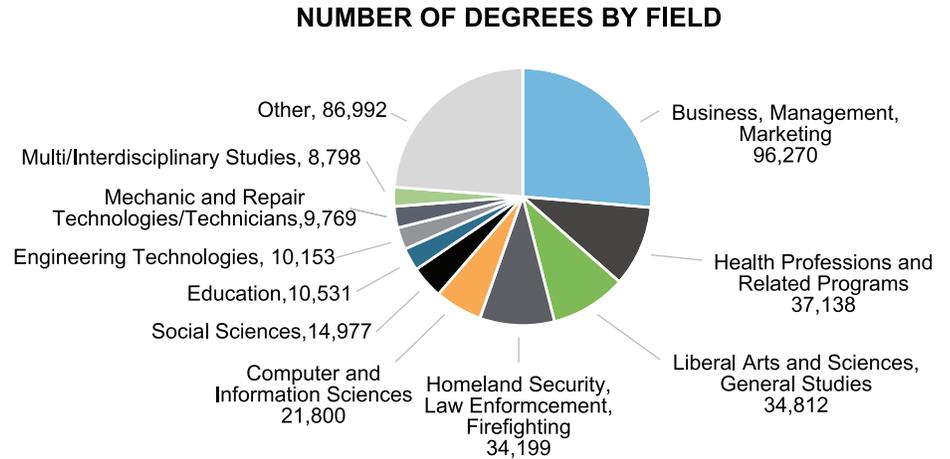
# Veterans by the Numbers

Max Olson

National veteran employment totaled 9 million in 2019, with a seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 3.1%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Looking at employment by sector, the highest percentage of veterans worked in Government (21.5%), which is nearly double the rate of the next two sectors – Manufacturing (12%) and Professional and Business Services (11.8%).

Veteran employment – like most other demographics – has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession. In August 2020, national veteran employment fell 7.6% year-over-year and 6.5% since January, while the unemployment rate peaked at 11.8% in April and improved to 6.6% in August. Comparatively, veterans have fared better than nonveterans in employment, with the nonveteran unemployment rate peaking at 14.8% in April and declining to 8.5% in August. The average labor force participation rate of prime age veterans (25 to 54) is 82.8% in August 2020, compared to 81% for nonveterans.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill passed on June 30, 2008 was one of the most substantial updates in the history of the program,

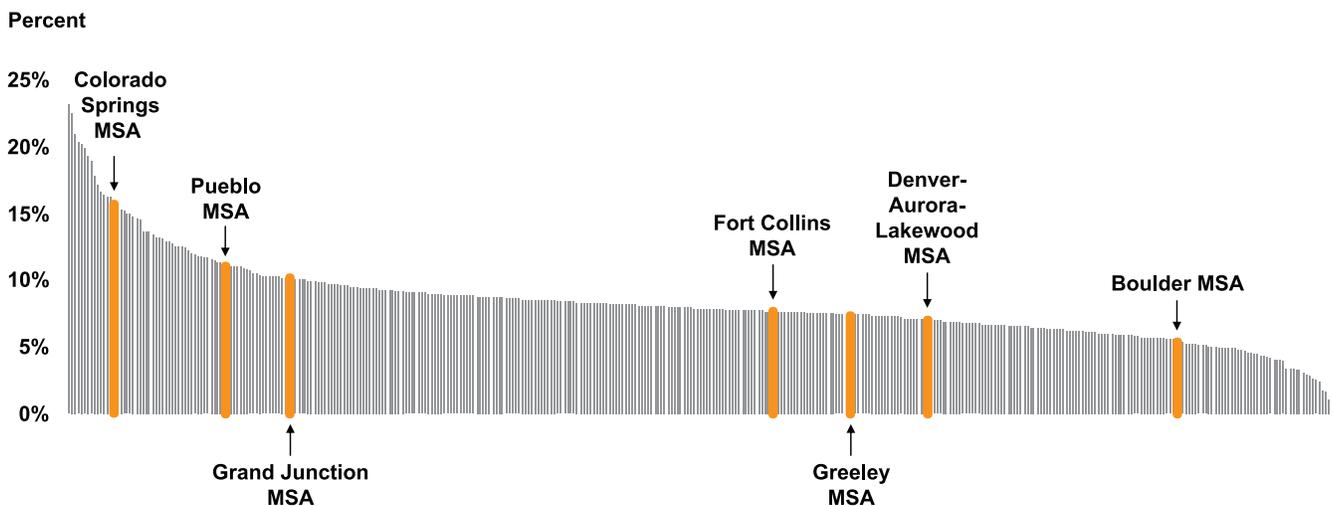


Source: Student Veterans of America's National Veteran Education Success Tracker.

granting education benefits to those who have served on active duty at least 90 days since September 10, 2001. Those who qualify for the maximum benefit receive coverage for the full cost of public, in-state tuition and fees. More recently, the Forever GI Bill was signed into law in 2017, which removed the 15-year limitation tied to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, ensuring veterans could use their GI bill whenever they wanted.

The National Veteran Education Success Tracer (NVEST) Project, a study published in 2017 by Student Veterans of America in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the National Student Clearinghouse, was used to track postsecondary outcomes of student veterans, specifically the Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries. The study reported a 72% post-secondary student success rate – 54% having

## VETERAN CONCENTRATIONS BY MSA PERCENT OF POPULATION 18 AND OVER, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.



# Fulfilling A Shared Mission: U.S. Veterans and Maxar

## How Veterans are Driving Commercial Innovation for Government Missions

Megan Van Patten



Mission Operations Center in Colorado. Photo courtesy of Maxar.

For the past two decades, Westminster, Colorado-based Maxar Technologies has partnered with U.S. defense and intelligence agencies and allied nations to protect national and global security. Maxar Technologies collects 90% of the satellite imagery used to create Foundation GEOINT for the U.S. government, producing billions of square kilometers of high-quality, current satellite imagery accessible to over 300,000 intelligence analysts, warfighters, and first responders around the world. Many of the critical Maxar team members behind these operations are U.S. military veterans.

Representing nearly every military branch, U.S. veterans make up 10% of our 4,000+ employee base at 20 locations worldwide.

“Each of our team members makes a unique contribution to our mission, and this includes our veterans who have chosen to work at Maxar after their service in the military,” said Dan Jablonsky, CEO of Maxar and a former U.S. Naval officer. “We welcome the real-world experience they bring to solving tough challenges and delivering real results for our customers. We’ve seen how veterans easily transition from the military to our work environment because

of the shared sense of mission and the commitment to purpose that is a hallmark of Maxar’s culture.”

From engineering and operations to sales and leadership, Maxar enables veterans to inform, develop, and manage products, systems, and capabilities that bring innovative solutions to government, humanitarian, and environmental challenges. Veterans contribute to vital functions including satellite operations and collection planning, electrical and mechanical engineering, computer science, and GEOINT analysis—all critical to bringing Earth Intelligence capabilities



Maxar's satellite manufacturing facility in Palo Alto, CA. Photo courtesy of Maxar.

to bear in support of warfighting and intelligence-gathering missions.

The strategic planning and technical skills of our veterans in account management, manufacturing, and mission operations ensure satellite capabilities and ground systems can meet the needs of defense and intelligence customers as well as of commercial and academic organizations for next-generation communications, emergency response, and climate studies. Despite the complexity of our work, our team remains focused on mission success. And our veterans are models for remaining calm and steady while delivering what our customers need on high-stakes projects and often tight timelines.

Some examples of where our team members have deployed their expertise

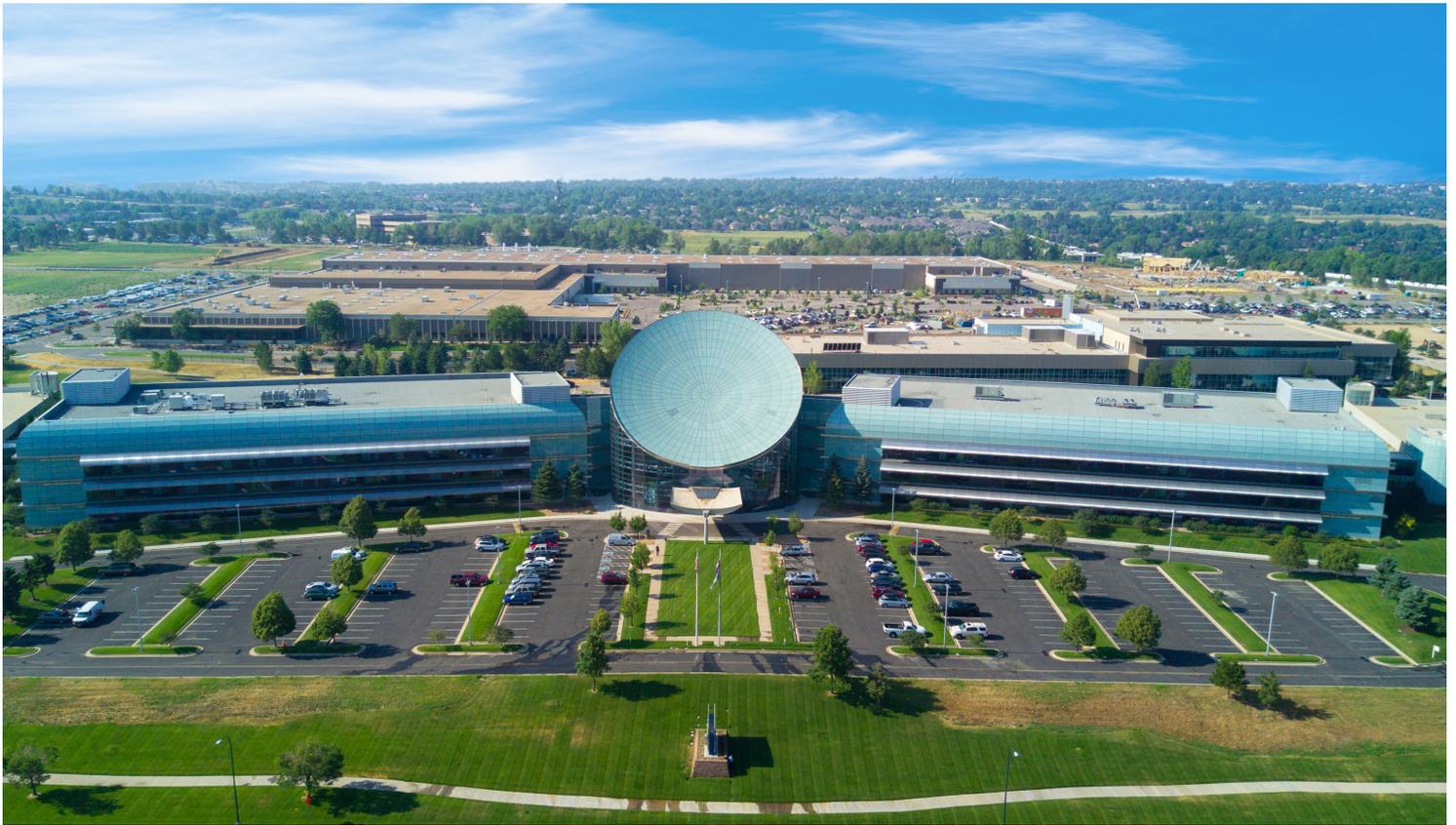
to real-world challenges include the NGA Open Mapping Enclave, a collaborative mapping platform for trusted users, and DeepCore, a geospatial computer vision toolkit that helps analysts automate broad area search for accelerated timelines.

"As an engineer officer in the U.S. Army assigned to a topographic engineering unit, I learned the foundations of geospatial measurements and mapmaking, which are core missions we serve in the Earth Intelligence business at Maxar," said Ken J., a director of product marketing management and U.S. Army veteran. I've been with the company for four years, and I enjoy working with this amazing team and find it fulfilling to continue to serve the U.S. and allies' defense missions."

"My favorite Maxar value is 'We Do It Right.' To me that means we don't take

shortcuts, we delight our customers with our current capabilities, and we innovate and improve our capabilities for the future. Many companies in the industry claim they will be able to do something amazing in a few years. Maxar does amazing things every day."

According to Amanda L., a collection planning analyst at Maxar, "Enlisting as an Aerographer's Mate in the U.S. Navy helped prepare me for success in my civilian career. My experience there drove my interest in GIS/mapping, and I explored that career field a little more while in college. When I spoke with the college recruiter from Maxar, I noticed how much he enjoyed the work and appreciated the company's values. Now I'm a part of the company. I love the people I work with and what we do. My favorite Maxar value is 'We Act Like



Maxar headquarters, Westminster, Colorado. Photo courtesy of Maxar.

Owners.’ Nothing is more empowering than being able to own the work you do daily.”

“Learning the importance of discipline in the U.S. Air Force prepared me to be a good decision-maker and helps me ensure we avoid impacts to operations while maximizing velocity,” said Ben B., a satellite operations engineer. “My experience with the Space-Based Infrared satellite program taught me a lot about satellite engineering and mission operations. While still rigorous, satellite engineering and operations at Maxar is different in the collaboration and mission-impacting decisions we are making. At Maxar, ‘We Act Like Owners.’ This value we live by ensures the continued success of our mission by empowering us to make sound decisions and collaborate with stakeholders and own the work we do daily.”

### Empowering Vets to Continue Serving their Communities

In addition to employing many veterans, Maxar is a proud partner of Team

Rubicon, a volunteer organization that mobilizes veterans to help communities prepare, respond, and recover from disasters and humanitarian crises. “Geospatial data enables us to have more information quickly and be more effective by directing our teams based on what we see. The use of data and being innovative in this industry can assist in moving faster and helping more people, so the more impact we can have the better of a world we can live in,” Lauren Vatie, National Planning and Disaster Response at Team Rubicon.

### Exploring Opportunities for What Comes Next

Maxar provides free career services for U.S. military members and veterans ready to transition or begin a civilian career. This includes resume reviews and mentors who can help identify transferable skills, provide professional contacts, and conduct mock-interviews. We know you went above and beyond to serve your country, and we are happy to go above and beyond for you. 

*Megan Van Patten is a Talent Acquisition Marketing Specialist at Maxar. The Maxar career team may be reached at [careers@maxar.com](mailto:careers@maxar.com). Find out more at <https://www.maxar.com/careers/military-veterans-talent/>.*

# Lost (and Found) in Transition: A Student Veteran Perspective

Zach Baumann



Photo courtesy of Zach Baumann.

When it comes time for us veterans to transition into the civilian world, or even just to start to engage with it through social media such as LinkedIn, it can be very challenging to translate the whole of our careers into plain civilian “speak.” And after five years as a Personnel Officer in the United States Air Force, I’ve seen and done more than I could have ever imagined. There have been great highs and challenging lows – like

celebrating Christmas morning with my family via FaceTime or adding the “D” word (depression) to my vocabulary for the first time after a one-year tour of duty in South Korea (shoutout to my counselor, Pat). There have also been triumphs, like when my team that ran the entire base’s deployment readiness was recognized as best in the USAF that year. There have even been big laughs, like when I called a few thousand Airmen to

their feet on accident (this call is reserved for the moment when the commanding officer walks in the room). Or the time my ukulele-led Christmas Carols brought tears to the eyes of a group of generals’ wives judging our unit’s holiday spirit. Even amidst the fun and not-so-fun, I’ve always had more responsibility than what I thought I could handle. Some things were core to my field, like the whirlwind of an experience it was to lead

a 34-person human resources (HR) team that supported 5,000 troops. And some were not so “core,” like spearheading multiple large-scale base projects or the time I escorted staffers from the House Armed Services Committee all around South Korea. Or when I was the main liaison between a U.S. joint headquarters and the South Korean Ministry of Defense in order to break down cultural barriers and strengthen the strategic alliance between the two. I have learned and grown so much over the years, but I still struggle to believe that these experiences are valuable or that they successfully translate to the civilian world.

It was the Fall of 2019 when I arrived in Boulder to start an MBA at the Leeds School of Business. I was both excited and nervous to meet the rest of my cohort. “What experience did I really bring?” my inner voice whispered to me. The imposter syndrome was real. As I continued to give my “pitch” and meet new colleagues, I became increasingly frustrated at the military-to-civilian translation challenge. So much so that despite all of the amazing experiences I’ve had, I found myself describing the whole of my career in a rather lackluster way, some sort of professional white flag: “I’m Zach. I... work in HR... for the Air Force.” At that point, my own self-doubts may have won the battle, but not the war.

After one year here at Leeds, my original orientation anxiety turned out to be outweighed by the vibrant support system and community that has surrounded me. Even more so, there are supportive veterans scattered throughout the faculty, student body, and the overall Colorado business ecosystem. Originally, I came back to school to build out my analytical toolkit, increase business literacy, and learn to think more strategically about complex problems. And don’t get me wrong, those things are happening. But as it turns out, the most impactful growth has been finding a place where I could debunk the self-imposed myth that my military experiences were somehow sub-par. I recall a powerful moment when one of my professors, a veteran himself who has had various



Student CASE competition. Photo courtesy of Zach Baumann.

successful careers in law and beyond, boldly told a fellow classmate of mine, a veteran and U.S. Army Ranger, that “... there is absolutely no room here for you to discount your military experience. Not in my classroom, not anywhere.” And to that end, I’ve realized that so much of what I call “resume shavings” are exactly what bring so much value and perspective to my teams. And thanks to the inclusive culture here at CU, I’ve been able to proceed with confidence as I engage daily with the world beyond the uniform.

To my fellow veterans thinking about, or in the process of, entering the civilian world: It’s nerve-racking, I know. School is a great place to start. It’s a place where you can really unpack the total grab-bag of experiences that have made the greatest impact on you and the world around you. It’s a place to find what exactly you are passionate about. What has it been for me? I’ve learned that my passion for people receives a warm welcome in the world of business. I’ve never been so excited about my professional future. To quote

the late father of “disruptive innovation” and Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen, who describes Management in a way that we veterans know well, Management is “the most noble of professions if it’s practiced well... No other occupation offers as many ways to help others learn and grow, take responsibility and be recognized for achievement, and contribute to the success of a team.”

I’ve run out of room... My name is Zach, and I work in HR for the Air Force. 

*Zach Baumann is an active-duty USAF officer and currently a full-time MBA candidate at the University of Colorado - Boulder Leeds School of Business. Upon graduation (May 2021) he will head to San Antonio, Texas to join the USAF’s Strategic Assessment Cell – a team of organizational psychologists and researchers within the Air Force’s Personnel Center.*

# Veteran and Military Affairs: Creating Successful Transitions

Emily Heninger and Amy Westfeldt



*Helping student veterans and their families transition from military service to student life is a top priority for the Veteran and Military Affairs team. Photo courtesy of Patrick Campbell/University of Colorado.*

The Veteran and Military Affairs (VMA) team at the University of Colorado Boulder helps student veterans and their families transition from military service to student life and into the workforce, supporting them during their time on campus and beyond. These times of transition can be tough, which is why the VMA team exists—to help student veterans and their families succeed.

Under the leadership of CU Boulder's Chancellor Philip DiStefano, three strategic imperatives guide the campus community each day: 1) shape tomorrow's leaders; 2) be the top university for innovation; and 3) positively impact humanity. VMA fosters each of these areas, empowering veterans to

lead, innovate, and impact while adding to the vibrancy of the campus community.

The VMA program was established in 2012 in a small space in CU Boulder's Center for Community. In 2013, retired Navy Capt. Stewart Elliott – a 28-year Navy SEAL, Boulder native, and CU Boulder alumnus – was hired as the director for Veteran and Military Affairs. Six years later, the team moved to a larger space in the new Center for Academic Success and Engagement (CASE) building, centrally located on campus next to the University Memorial Center.

As a one-stop shop for CU Boulder's military community, VMA is the main point of contact for prospective and current

student veterans and their families to receive personal, academic, and career support, as well as learn about veteran-specific programs, policies, pay, and more.

In addition to the move to the CASE building, CU Boulder continues to make significant investments in student veterans, their families, and veteran dependents by hiring additional staff for academic innovation initiatives, including a veteran-focused academic advisor and professional academic tutors for math, physics, and natural science.

The VMA team recognizes this community's unique circumstances and the need for support as they adapt from structured military service to student life. Many student veterans are older than their classmates, and at least 70% are also first-generation college students. The loss of their tight-knit military community can be difficult.

Additionally, CU Boulder's student veteran population is growing, matching a national trend as the number of returning veterans increases. In 2007, there were fewer than 500 student veterans and veteran dependents on our campus. Today, there are more than 1,500, effectively tripling enrollment over the past decade.

As the student veteran community evolves, the campus's resources need to adapt as well. Not only do these returning patriots deserve our gratitude and support, but at a scale that can meet this growing demand.

A recognized leader among tier-one research universities and the only member of the prestigious Association of American Universities in the Rocky Mountain region, CU Boulder is committed to elevating and sustaining a robust veteran resource center. Our

campus is part of a broader network of Colorado universities working together to ensure returning veterans find success in higher education and beyond.

As CU Boulder's VMA program has expanded, the team has developed a strategic plan to inform continued growth. We envision a future where every student veteran is positioned for success at CU Boulder and beyond.

With partnerships and philanthropic support, the VMA team is able to:

**Elevate:** Continue to grow a sustainable, robust resource center that holistically supports student veterans, dependents, and their families, including much-needed student aid and scholarships. In academic year 2021, \$182,000 in donor-funded scholarships was awarded to 66 students, and \$30,000 in student relief aid was distributed to students impacted by COVID-19.

**Accelerate:** Coordinate career pathways and services for student veterans, dependents, and their families, including continued expansion of the highly successful Summer Bridge and Winter Bridge programs, to match the growing student veteran population. The positive impacts of these programs have not only helped student veterans successfully transition to higher education but have helped them create social connections and integrate more fully into the CU Boulder campus community.

**Connect and engage:** Embed clinical services with clinicians that are either veterans or have experience working with the veteran population and create preventative and educational programming that is specific to student veterans and their dependents. Our VMA student staff work to cultivate social engagement, belonging, and inclusion among student veterans through VMA-hosted events, programs, and student events.

At CU Boulder, we empower student veterans and their families to achieve success in their post-military educations and careers. We know veterans are natural leaders with the potential to positively impact humanity; CU Boulder



2018 graduation ceremony, CU Boulder campus. Photo courtesy of Glenn Asakawa/University of Colorado.

just helps them along the way. VMA's holistic support services and a strong, welcoming community ensure that student veterans innovate and thrive.

More broadly, CU Boulder's VMA programs prepare student veterans for productive careers in burgeoning industries including energy, aerospace, and defense. Growing partnerships with Colorado businesses help sustain a robust career pipeline for student veterans, allowing them to find meaningful positions and contribute their knowledge to these fields.

Further, partnerships with local foundations such as The Anschutz Foundation, as well as with national companies such as Phillips 66, will continue to propel the VMA program's growth. After graduation, CU Boulder student veterans find success in a wide range of careers, including as engineers, business leaders, and scientists who will drive economic growth and industry prominence throughout Colorado and beyond.

As the VMA team continues to fulfill its vision and goals, CU Boulder will continue to sustain and grow its

reputation as a respected destination for student veterans and their families, supporting transitions at all stages. Partnerships across campus and within the Front Range community will facilitate student veterans' academic, social, and professional success, and the VMA office will continue to support a vibrant, integrated community where all student veterans can feel engaged and supported.

*Emily Heninger is a Storyteller and Copy Editor, and Amy Westfeldt is Senior Director of Development with the Office of Advancement at the University of Colorado Boulder. They may be reached at [Emily.Heninger@colorado.edu](mailto:Emily.Heninger@colorado.edu) and [Amy.Westfeldt@colorado.edu](mailto:Amy.Westfeldt@colorado.edu).*

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His proud image, wearing his spacesuit, serves as a symbol of how high veterans can fly and how they can raise our state with them. 

CU-Boulder alumnus Christian Anschutz serves on the advisory board of Leeds School of Business. As managing director of Western Development Group, a real estate development company

in Denver, he has had the privilege of hiring veterans including the current head of the company's construction department. He also is president of The Anschutz Foundation. Christian supports the military in various roles including as a member of the U.S. Air Force Space Command Civic Leaders Group, the Air Force Chief of Staff Civic Leaders Group (emeritus), and a member of the Ft. Carson Task Force 2022. He is also an Honorary Commander for the U.S. Air Force Academy and serves as a trustee for the U.S. Air Force Academy Foundation. In addition to numerous awards honoring his contributions to our military partners, Christian received the Community Hero Award from the 460th Space Wing at Buckley Air Force Base and is a recipient of Ft. Carson's prestigious Good Neighbor Award in recognition of his service.

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Turning foliage adds to the beauty surrounding the University of Colorado Boulder.  
Photo by Glenn Asakawa/University of Colorado.

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